

Community Focus Groups on Transportation

**A Report for The Providence Plan and
the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program**

**Submitted by Abu R. Bakr, Principal Consultant
Pamela Zappardino, Research Associate
Siana Collyer, Research Associate**

April 16, 2001

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II. Purpose of Study

The primary purpose of the study is to organize and facilitate community meetings (focus groups) in support of the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program's State Ground Transportation Plan update in 2001. During a meeting on January 8, 2001 with representatives of The Providence Plan, who initiated the Request for Proposal and the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program several project objectives were identified. They included:

1. Begin a process for enfranchising low income and minority groups who ordinarily do not have easy access to information and/or the opportunity to participate in the Statewide Planning decision making process.
2. Gain a greater understanding of the special needs of groups of people in Providence who are low income and potentially disenfranchised.
3. Generate "grass roots" input to update the Ground Transportation Plan.
4. Provide information to focus group participants about available resources and the planning process, and
5. Develop a model for replicating study efforts in other Rhode Island communities.

This written report summarizes the processes employed to identify constituent groups to include in the study, outreach and recruitment strategies, focus group methodology, focus group highlights and recommendations for transportation improvements and study replication.

III. Methodology

A. Identification of Critical Issues and Constituent Groups

1. Meeting with The Providence Plan and Statewide Planning Program to identify project goals
- January 8, 2001
(see *Section II. Purpose of Study*)
2. Meeting with Transportation Coordinating Committee to identify critical issues and constituent groups - January 10, 2001
 - a) Constituent Groups
 - (1) Elderly
 - (2) Disabled
 - (3) Single Parents/Families with Children
 - (4) Ethnic Groups
 - (a) African American
 - (b) Hispanic
 - (c) Southeast Asian
 - (d) Native American
 - (5) Presently in the Workforce
 - (6) Job Training
 - (7) Youth
 - b) Critical Issues - (see *Appendix A. Focus Group Questions*)

B. Outreach and Recruitment Strategy

The consultant met with staff from The Providence Plan to identify agencies throughout the city of Providence in order to recruit clients representing the target constituent groups for the study. Agencies were identified from neighborhoods dispersed geographically around the city and in areas where the client populations would likely be racially and ethnically diverse. Agencies were also identified that serve youth, the elderly, persons with disabilities, those who speak English as a Second Language, and individuals with limited incomes. Agency directors were informed of the nature of the focus groups and were asked to identify ideal focus group times and select individuals to participate. The agencies chosen who met the above criteria included:

<u>Agency</u>	<u>CONSTITUENT GROUP</u>
1. Mount Hope Neighborhood Association.....	FAMILY
2. Joslin Community Center.....	FAMILY
3. Westminster Senior Center.....	ELDERLY/DISABLED
4. Job Link.....	JOB SEEKERS
5. Providence Housing Authority/ Dexter Manor.	DISABLED
6. International Institute.....	FAMILY/IMMIGRANT
7. YouthBuild Providence.....	YOUTH
8. Youth in Action.....	YOUTH
9. Southeast Asian Development Corporation....	ASIAN/IMMIGRANT
10. Dominica Manor.....	ELDERLY/DISABLED
11. Goodwill Industries.....	DISABLED/JOB SEEKERS
12. The Genesis Center.....	IMMIGRANT/FAMILY

C. Focus Group Methodology and Analysis

1. Focus Group Structure

- a) Focus groups were conducted for approximately 1 1/2 hours each.
- b) Focus groups followed the focus group question guideline (*see Appendix A. Focus Group Questions*).
- c) Focus groups were electronically recorded and/or documented by a notetaker.
- d) Focus Group participants received a set of handouts which included RIPTA bus information, information about the transportation planning process, and individuals and agencies to contact regarding transportation related concerns (*see Appendix C. Focus Group Handouts*).

2. Focus Group Analysis

- a) Each focus group was recorded and the discussions were transcribed verbatim. (*see Appendix B. Focus Group Transcripts*) During instances when recordings are unclear, written notes are used and/or the facilitators' notes and recollection of highlights of the focus group sessions.
- b) Focus Group transcriptions were coded and content analyzed to identify highlights and common themes across focus groups (*see Section IV. Summary Findings*).
- c) Paraphrased comments and verbatim recommendations by participants have been identified and reported (*see Appendix B. Focus Group Transcripts - Focus Group Highlights and Recommendations*)
- d)** Consultant recommendations for transportation improvements based upon participant comments and study replication are reported (*see Section V. Recommendations*).

IV. Summary Findings

The constituent groups, by virtue of their economic status, citizenship status, English language proficiency, age, and mobility are reliant on public transportation, walking and alternative modes of transportation provided by others, most notably friends, relatives, governmental and social service agencies.

Weather, environmental conditions, subtle and overt discrimination and public policy disproportionately affect the populations selected for participation in this study more than constituent groups who are able to utilize privately owned transportation. Thus, they have less control of their time and are less able to tend to daily living requirements based upon their own schedules or preferences. They are extremely concerned about these issues and compared to other groups spend an inordinate amount of time planning their transportation and time spent in transit. These constituents also perceive that they spend an inordinate amount of their available income on transportation.

Participants' economic livelihoods, sense of independence and self-esteem are affected by their abilities to access private and public services. Those who are in job training programs are assisted by the agencies that serve them during their training periods. They provide transportation to certain destinations including job interviews, however their ability to accept employment and to meet the requirements of employers to work non-traditional hours is directly related to their ability to use reliable and flexible transportation. Most of the groups in this study expressed concern that public transportation schedules and routes do not serve certain areas of the city and state adequately, nor do they provide adequate service at times during mid-day, the evenings, and weekends. Many individuals who work, are involved in school or job training programs, or are elderly and/or disabled are unable to attend, safely and comfortably, after school related activities, tend to duties such as laundry or shopping until the evening or on weekends, or attend cultural events.

The reduced bus schedules during mid-day, evenings and weekends create major inconveniences for these constituents. They are forced to rely on transportation from friends or family or to take taxis, the most expensive form of transportation available. Although expensive, cabs are effective in that they can transport shopping bags and children easily and take much less time to travel between destinations. Participants also discussed the necessity of walking to many destinations because it is more time efficient and may be the only way to get to a destination. Some also discussed the fact that walking may

be necessitated by buses that are running late or that simply do not show up. Walking for most is almost always considered dangerous and risky.

Many of the participants discussed the advantages and their appreciation of their eligibility for free and/or discounted bus travel. Students who live a specific distance from the schools they attend have the ability to receive free bus passes. The elderly and disabled are also able to receive free bus passes, reduced fares, RIDE services, and agency specific transportation assistance. Parents with children who receive public assistance are also eligible for passes.

Although provisions have been made for low-income groups, almost all of the participants perceive that these services should be modified to further reduce transportation costs and to allow more individuals to be eligible for free and/or discounted travel. Notably, youth who attend school inside the minimum distance and who are ineligible for the free bus pass, see this policy as unfair. They see themselves as living too far from the school to walk on a daily basis, especially during the winter months when snowy and icy conditions and early darkness are major concerns. Those who do not receive bus passes must pay the regular fare to ride the bus to school, which they perceive as excessively costly.

Most participants perceive themselves as particularly vulnerable to conditions that jeopardize their health and safety, since they are exposed to walking in dangerous areas (subject to human attack) and under dangerous conditions (icy and slippery sidewalks, unlit streets). This sense of peril exists even on public transportation, where they must confront the prejudicial attitudes of some drivers towards the elderly, youth, disabled, foreign born and racial minorities. Hazardous and insensitive driving habits as well as daily confrontations with harassing and dangerous individuals who also ride on public transportation were also reported. The conditions reported by handicapped individuals and youth were particularly alarming.

Recreational activities such as walking, bicycling, rollerskating, skateboarding, etc., are not engaged in by adults within their own communities without a sense of peril. Children are discouraged from using bikes as a means of recreation and transportation because of dangers perceived by their parents from potential thieves or reckless drivers. Participants are aware of bicycle and walking paths, but regard them as too far away to be used regularly. While they recognize the potential benefit of

having these constructed in their neighborhoods, they also readily point to their ineffectiveness without proper security safeguards to encourage their use.

Participants have developed and utilize effective informal as well as formal networks for obtaining information relevant to their transportation needs. The most common information sources are friends and family, social service agencies, and RIPTA (bus drivers, telephone, bus schedules, and information booth at Kennedy Plaza). They are concerned that some information may change unexpectedly and they have no way of becoming aware of the changes. Since their lives are dependent upon these schedules, they see this as a major concern. Those with limited English language proficiency (other than Spanish speaking) cannot access some written information. These individuals as well as those with mobility and visual impairments also feel intimidated to ask for information and assistance while in route from impatient and insensitive bus drivers. Elderly and disabled individuals served by social service agencies are mostly aware of the transportation options available to them although sometimes this information is not always consistently and effectively communicated.

In addition to common concerns about the insensitivity and poor human relations and communication skills of many drivers, all of the constituent groups related specific instances of excellent customer service from RIPTA bus drivers. The most common recollections of participants were of drivers who were courteous, friendly, flexible, willing to provide assistance, willing to by providing information, and cognizant of the safety needs of passengers. These driver characteristics were related frequently and were appreciated by the participants.

Those who drive mentioned parking and traffic in downtown Providence, the conditions of the roads and road signage as their most significant concerns. Potholes and spotty and inefficient snow removal were commonly cited. Relatively, these were not considered major issues and drivers felt that they have learned to compensate appropriately.

Specific participants' recommendations on the above issues are listed in the Focus Group Highlights and Recommendations sections following the verbatim transcriptions of each focus group (see *Appendix B. Focus Group Transcripts*)

V. Recommendations

A. Transportation Related Recommendations

1. Accessibility, Reliability, Comfort, Safety

- a) All handicapped accessible buses, inspected regularly.**
- b) Extended trolley service into non-downtown areas**
- c) Improved mid-day, evening and weekend service**
- d) Transportation information outreach seminars (agency and constituent group specific)**
- e) Multiple point sources for bus information**
 - (1) Kennedy Plaza (2) Bus stops (3) Gas Stations**
 - (4) Buses (5) Social Service Agencies (6) Major Supermarkets**
 - (7) Local supermarkets**
- f) Security / assistance personnel at Kennedy Plaza and on buses (police, volunteers, "grass roots" employees)**
- g) Installation of "distress / panic boxes."**
- h) Shelters at all bus stops.**
- i) Coordination of service with social service agencies.**
- j) Coordination of service with major employers.**
- k) Coordination of service with supermarkets, major shopping centers and malls.**
- l) New and more direct service routes to outlying areas (example: Roger Williams Park to South County destinations)**
- m) Mandatory service to all hospitals.**
- n) Improved safety measures and policies for crowded buses.**
- o) Bike racks on all buses.**
- p) Required stop at all bus stops.**

2. Customer Service
 - a) **Cultural Competence Training for RIPTA drivers and other personnel**
 - b) **Multilingual information (printed material, phone service)**
 - c) **Driver announced route information.**
 - d) **Discretionary policies for drivers to allow free ridership.**
3. Affordability
 - a) **Modify bus pass policy for students**
 - b) **Transportation Fund for income eligible individuals (Good Neighbor Energy Fund)**
 - c) **Medical assistance vouchers**
 - d) **Grant opportunities with non-profit social service agencies.**
4. Pedestrian Safety
 - a) **Improved lighting at all bus stops**
 - b) **Aggressive roadway enhancements for wheelchair assisted travelers.**
 - c) **Aggressive snow removal policies.**
 - d) **Neighborhood traffic calming with community participation.**
5. Walking and Bicycling for Exercise and Recreation
 - a) **Inner city bike paths and lanes with security, lighting and signage**
6. Driving Conditions and Signage
 - a) **Inner city and downcity signage including major landmarks, number sequences for blocks.**
 - b) **Bigger signs with new reflective paint**
 - c) **Reflective lane paint on highways**
 - d) **Aggressive resurfacing**
 - e) **Radio and highway "marquee" signs announcing road and traffic conditions.**

B. Study Replication Recommendations

1. Follow the methodology outlined in this report
2. Incorporate interviews with social service agency staff and governmental agencies for more in-depth information related to services provided to clients and targeted constituent groups.
3. Conduct brief "on the street" and "on bus" surveys with riders re: wait and travel time, destination, customer service, etc.
4. Conduct interviews with employers to gain insight into their perception of transportation issues of their employees.
5. Incorporate agency and constituent group specific information sessions as an immediate follow-up to focus groups.
6. Limit numbers of groups to minimize analysis time and cost.
7. Follow-up with community groups prior to design and implementation of transportation improvements.

VI. Appendix

A. Focus Group Questions - the following questions were used as a general guideline for facilitators to engage participants in discussions about transportation issues. The actual questions used vary for each group depending on their appropriateness and relevance to the issues raised by the participants.

1. Let start out with a really easy question just to get us warmed up. Think back through the year 2000; name all of the ways that you got from one place to another, whether or not it was 10 feet or 10,000 miles.
2. For each of the ways mentioned, inquire what activities were associated with each type of travel?
 - a) Walk
 - b) Bicycle
 - c) Bus
 - d) Train
 - e) Plane
 - f) Boat
 - g) Crawl
3. Bus travel:
 - a) Where do you take the bus?
 - b) Why do you take the bus?
 - c) Please describe your experience taking the bus with respect to these issues.
Would you say that bus travel is:
 - (1) Accessible – close to your home, work
 - (2) Affordable –
 - (3) Comfortable – (inside the bus, at bus stops[shelters])
 - (4) Effective (does the bus effectively get you where you want to go?)
 - (5) Efficient – buses available at times you need to travel, on time, frequent
 - (6) Safe –
 - d) If you needed to go somewhere you were not familiar with somewhere out of your normal routine, would you know how to find out if a bus could take you there?
 - e) Have any of you been in that situation? Can you tell us how it worked out?
 - f) Can you talk about the helpfulness and courtesy of RIPTA personnel (bus drivers)
 - g) Are there times or reasons why you would not take the bus?
 - h) What ideas or suggestions would you make to improve bus travel in Providence?

4. Walking: I'd like to focus on walking now since I am assuming that you have to walk to get to the bus. Is there anyone who gets to the bus using a different form of transportation? (If yes, ask questions specific to these forms of transportation)
 - a) When you walk to catch the bus how would you describe the distance you have to walk? Long? Short?
 - b) Are the streets and sidewalks in decent enough condition and safe for walking?
 - c) How about during the wintertime? Snow storms, etc.
 - d) Does anyone walk for recreational purposes, exercise, etc.?
 - e) If you were aware of a walking path that you could use for the purpose of exercising, would you do it?
 - f) Are you aware of any walking paths in Providence? Are there any within walking distance to your home?
 - g) What ideas or suggestions would you make walking in Providence easier and safer?
5. Auto travel:
 - a) Where do you usually drive?
 - b) What are your general impressions about driving in the city of Providence? Throughout Rhode Island?
 - c) If you are driving somewhere you are not familiar with, how do you find out how to get there?
 - d) Is the signage on the roads and streets clear and helpful?
 - e) What ideas or suggestions would you make to make driving in Providence easier and safer?
6. Do you ever use any other form of transportation?
 - a) Why? Why not?
7. Bicycle
 - a) Does anyone use a bicycle?
 - b) Is Providence "bicycle friendly?"
 - c) Why?
 - d) Why not?
8. How many of you have children?
 - a) How do your children get around to their activities?
 - b) Do you take responsibility for transporting them to their activities?
 - c) Are there particular concerns that you have about them being able to get their activities?
9. Is there anything else we should have asked or discussed today that we did not so far?

B. Focus Group Transcripts Highlights and Recommendations

Transcript Symbols

- Verbatim Participant Comment
- ✓ Paraphrased Participant Comment
- ▶▶ Verbatim Participant Recommendation for Improvement

1. Mount Hope Neighborhood Association

February 12, 2001

Facilitating: Abu Bakr

Recording/Notetaking: Siana Collyer

The focus group began at 6:12 p.m. Abu Bakr began by introducing himself. There had been some discontent growing among the group prior to the discussion, as many had been told that some funding was available, and their opinions were being solicited for how the funds should be used. Abu apologized for the misunderstanding, and explained that they had been asked to the group to provide their input and comments about transportation in the city of Providence. He emphasized that the purpose of the evening was about them, as citizens and users of a variety of transportation methods. The Providence Plan would use their input (together with that of 14 other groups across the city) to formulate improvements in transportation. He explained that their recommendations are important and will be used.

Abu also explained that everyone had been passed copies of some resource information: bus route maps, a list of people to call with transportation questions, a sheet explaining the purpose of the focus groups. He told the attendees that later in the year, everyone in the group has an opportunity to review a draft of the State Transportation Plan (that will be created as a result of citizen input) before it is finalized.

Abu introduced Siana Collyer, and explained that she would take notes to make sure that everyone's thoughts and suggestions are recorded. He explained that she is able to get the most accurate information on paper if we can also record the conversation. No one objected, and so Siana commenced with taping and notetaking. Abu promised that everyone would be finished at 7:30 p.m., and were welcome to take with them some of the food that would soon arrive.

In this report, Abu's questions are highlighted. The dialogue at this focus group was extremely animated, and not all speakers are identifiable. The speakers' suggestions are paraphrased below each of Abu's questions.

Constituent / Participant Group: Family

Abu: Think back through the whole year, the year 2000. Name all the ways you got from one place to another, whether it was 10 feet or 10,000 miles.

- | | | |
|---------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| ➤ Bus | ➤ Car | ➤ Plane/flying |
| ➤ Vans | ➤ Bikes | ➤ Trucks |
| ➤ Motorcycles | ➤ Go cart | ➤ Rollerblades/rollerskates |
| ➤ Scooters | ➤ Skipping | ➤ Skateboarding |
| ➤ Walking | ➤ Boat | |

Abu: Where do you rollerskate?

- Rollerskating areas

Someone says out loud, "skateboarding," which prompts **Abu to ask: Skateboarding?**

- Skateboarding is illegal in the city of Providence and why can't we change that?
- Young people and adults both skateboard
- Riding on a skateboard in front of your mother's home, you can get a ticket in the city of Providence. They take your skateboard and you don't get it back until you pay the ticket.

Abu: Now I know one person in here says they skateboard. Some of you have young people who do that a lot? Where do they go?

- My son. On the street. He rides *on the street*.
- On the sidewalk. He's seven.
- Me, I do it for recreation.

Abu: Another issue I heard a lot of you mention is taking the bus. How many of you take the bus? [Multiple people raise hands; 12-20 people.] **When you take the bus, where do you generally take it?**

- Downtown
- To work
- To the clubs
- To friends' houses

Abu: Is that your primary way of getting around? [Several people raise hands and several say "yes."] **Why?**

- Don't drive
- Don't have car
- Can't afford car/taxi

Abu: [addressing those who indicated they do have cars:] **When would be some times you would drive versus taking the bus?**

- Weather/when weather is bad

Someone indicates that they take the bus when they don't want to take their car downtown. **Abu asks: So you take the bus downtown instead of the car?**

- Yes
- Parking is so bad downtown

Abu: How do you get to the bus?

- Walk

Abu: Is it close?

- Yes
- You walk to the closest bus stop there is

Abu: Is it reasonably close?

- Yes
- No
- I can't walk worth nothing, so I don't. I call a cab.
- On Camp Street it's a tough situation, it's half and half. You either have to walk to Hope Street or North Main Street to catch a bus.

Abu: In other words, the bus doesn't run a regular schedule here on Camp Street?

- No
- It's limited timewise
- It doesn't run enough for us

Abu: When does it run?

- Working hours usually.
- Between 7 to 9 a.m., and then again 2 p.m. to 6.
- Nothing on the weekends
- No bus to Miriam Hospital, that's my big complaint. Every hospital in the city has bus service to the door, and there are elderly people here who can't afford a cab and need to visit someone in the hospital or something.
- We need to have easy, accessible transportation to our local hospital (which is Miriam), and to the Shaw's Plaza. It (49 bus) only goes Monday through Friday and there's a small window in the

morning and in the afternoon. Let's say you work Monday through Friday and you want to go shopping on Saturday; too bad, you lose.

- The 53 bus goes, but you got to take two buses to get to a supermarket you could walk to in fifteen minutes, and those buses maybe run once an hour.

Abu: All right, the bus doesn't run on Saturday to get you to Shaw's. And for folks who are not in the position to take the North Main Street bus, how do you do it?

- You call a cab.
- You get a ride with a friend who's going to the market.
- Do what you're doing right now...re-survey, find that there is a need...and that it's a problem that can be solved just like that.

Abu: So we've found out that if you want to go shopping on weekends it's a hassle. If you want to get downtown you take the bus. And you really need transportation to the hospital. Any other services you typically use that you have to take the bus to that might be a problem?

- Religious perspective: there are people that would love to get religious attention. But the one day they have to spend all day going to the store or the hospital, they wait for the bus. They can't go to church.
- East Side Apartments. Mount Hope comes and takes us one day a week, but they take 'em to Stop and Shop, and they want to also go to Shaw's. So I ask for two days a week, one to Stop and Shop, one to Shaw's.

Abu: So Mount Hope is helping to provide transportation to some folks who want to go shopping, but only during the week. [Speaker nods.]

Abu: Let me ask you about the schedule. When you walk and catch the bus, do you know what the schedules are when you go?

- Sometimes
- No
- Yes
- On North Main it's every fifteen minutes, half hour.

Abu: Does it run on schedule?

- Yeah, sometimes
- I like the schedules posted down in Kennedy Plaza. It would be nice if we had them up all the time, at more places.
- They should keep those schedules up.
- So convenient.

Abu: Where you all catch the bus here, is there a little shelter? [Multiple people respond at once, "no."] **So when it rains or snows, you catch it, right?** [Chorus of "yes" and "yup."] **Is it lit?** [Someone responds, "we're on Camp Street!" Round of laughter.] **The buses themselves: anyone ever been in an accident?**

- No
- My niece. Bus drivers should not allow people to cut in front of the bus...my niece got off the bus, crossed the street, and a car hit her.
- When that bus stops, they should have a stop sign like school buses that swings out and stops traffic.
- Some girl at Hope High School, she looked out to see if she could cross after she got off the bus and she got hit in the face.
- They have to make it safer to get on and off the bus.

Abu: Let me ask you now about relationships with the bus drivers. [Several people make exasperated noises: “uh-uh.” “Ugh!” “Oh no!”]

- There’s a lot of them that don’t even need to be working here. If you had a bad day, don’t take it out on people had nothing to do with it.
- Some of those bus drivers have a BAD attitude.
- I’ve seen bus drivers talk to old people like they’re nothing. This one old lady trying to climb into the bus and he [bus driver] just says, “will you hurry up?” Doesn’t try to help her, nothing.
- Some bus drivers don’t use the “kneeling bus” thing. Other people have to help the old folks into the bus.
- Some bus drivers drive right on by, don’t even slow down, don’t stop. Like you were never even there.
- They don’t enforce getting the young people to move for the older people or the disabled ones to sit down.
- A lot of them are real arrogant.
- Bus drivers don’t enforce the policies
- Bus drivers shouldn’t allow too many people on the bus. They shouldn’t put “standing room only” people on the bus.

Abu: Let me ask this ---any of you have any good experiences with bus drivers, where you thought they were real helpful?

- Yes
- A lot of them are really nice
- They speak to you when you get on the bus
- They tell you what your next stop is
- I know some really nice ones.
- You tell them what street you want to get off, and they tell you exactly where it is
- A lot of drivers give you a chance to get up to the next stop, they announce each street they’re coming to.

Abu: If you needed to go somewhere and you needed to take the bus, and you weren’t really familiar with where you were going, do you know where to get the information about which bus to take and when it comes?

- Call a friend
- Have that map downtown
- Ask someone
- Ask the bus driver
- Call RIPTA

Abu: Are the bus fares reasonable? {Multiple people respond in unison, “no.”} **How much are they now?**

- \$1.25 here to downtown
- \$1.50 to transfer
- It’s out of whack
- It’s way too much

Abu: Any ideas or suggestions you can think of right now that would make bus travel easier, safer, more accessible, more comfortable, that you want to offer?

- Snow removal, so when you’re getting off the bus you’re not stepping in a snow bank.
- Safety at Kennedy Plaza for the students. I know they’re putting more police patrols down there, but those people are sitting in their cars, they’re not out interacting with the kids. My fifteen year old son was jumped at 5:45 at night on a Monday down at Kennedy Plaza. Why isn’t there better security at Kennedy Plaza when there’s such a high volume of people using it?
- Yeah, New York City has security on the subways.
- Student bus passes. Some of the drivers are reasonable and they let kids use the bus passes. Sometimes kids are traveling to school-related events, using public transportation, and the drivers won’t let them use their pass because it’s not “getting to school” or “dismissal” times of the day.

Abu: How many of you have children that attend school and do not take a school bus?

- My kid *can't* take the school bus 'cause he's a quarter-mile outside the limit.
- Yes, mine take RIPTA.

Abu: So your kids have to walk or pay? Does that ever become a problem?

- Does it?!?!?
- Yeah, it does. I think \$35 a month for my kid to use the bus, and not even all the time, that's a problem.
- I think it's more a problem of *the system should serve kids*. All the money we spend on the bus line, they should service all the kids.
- Nonprofit should get some money for bus passes to disseminate to our clients, for poor families.

Abu: Let's focus a bit on walking, because obviously sometimes you have to walk to get to the bus, and you mentioned snow removal, and your walk to the bus is probably short, except when you have to walk to catch a more convenient bus. What's the condition of the sidewalks in this area?

- The walks, sidewalks in front of the school aren't plowed, so kids walk in the street.
- You're safer walking in the street because it's too icy on the walk.
- Businesses used to do it, homeowners.
- Look at Charlesgate, you see them old people walking to Stop & Shop, near the highways and Benny's, it's not right.
- We're not allowed to push the snow back into the street if they plow the snow into our driveways or sidewalks.
- The sidewalks are icy and dangerous. It's dangerous to walk to Miriam Hospital, or even in the street where the buses or cars go. In Russia it was always clean all winter, until spring.

Abu: Anybody do any walking just for exercise or recreation? Where do you walk?

- Yes. (multiple replies)
- Sure.
- I do.
- Up and down North Main Street
- To Stop and Shop, to Shaw's Market.

Abu: If there's snow, where do you walk?

- In the street (multiple replies)
- I drive to Blackstone Boulevard and walk.

Abu: Is there anywhere around here that's designed for people to walk, just for exercise?

- At Mount Hope
- Blackstone Boulevard
- Hope High School, we used to go there, but the track is locked now.

Abu: Anybody use a bicycle? Where do you go?

- Yes [multiple replies]
- In the summertime, I ride to work.
- To Miriam Hospital
- To Dunkin Donuts

Abu: Is it safe?

- Yes, mostly.
- I guess.

- My church is collecting bikes in the basement. We got 150 right now. In the summer we're thinking about doing bike rides for the kids. They can come and get a bike, a helmet, a water bottle.

Abu: Let me ask this question right now, since it's coming up. You're talking about bike rides. Are you thinking that you'll leave from somewhere here, then travel to pick them up?

- Depends on the age group. If it's teenagers, they'll be more responsible to leave from this destination to wherever, and if they're a younger group, we'll need to transport them from here to a safe location where they can ride their bikes.
- There's a bike path that starts at India Point.
- That's beautiful.
- There are different parts on that path you can drop people off, and start and finish.
- It's crowded, that's my only complaint.
- If I use it, I go at off-peak times.

Abu: OK, let's move on to talk now about driving. I'm probably going to look to wrap up our discussion talking about your driving, to leave some time for you to add anything you think we forgot to talk about, and also grab a sandwich to take home. There are some folks who have cars and others who don't. When you do use your cars, where do you go?

- Everywhere.
- Church
- Downtown
- Shopping
- Visits
- Library
- Doctors' appointments

Abu: What are your general impressions about driving in the city?

- It's terrible
- The potholes
- Yeah, I got a flat tire and a bent rim. It's difficult to avoid the potholes and they are so deep.
- How bad the potholes are depends on what part of the city you're in.

Abu: Can you name a part of the city that doesn't have potholes in it?

- Blackstone Boulevard
- Angell Street
- Waterman Street
- College Hill
- Brown, RISD
- Certain parts of Hope Street

Abu: This relates back to what we were talking about with buses; if you have to go somewhere and you're not really familiar with it, is the signage clear?

- No
- Some streets are missing signs
- Let me tell you about a bad corner: Larch and Abbott. For all four corners, there isn't even a stop sign. I have seen so many accidents there.

Abu: Are there any other intersections in the city like that?

- North Main and Cypress, they're working on it, but it's a mess. Nobody knows where to go and when to turn, it's awful
- Yeah, I hate that we pay taxes to have them fix this stuff right away
- They don't give you the knowledge to understand how to travel at that intersection

Abu: If you had to get somewhere and you didn't know how to get there, how would you find out?

- Pray first!
- Gas station
- Library
- Policeman
- AAA
- RIPTA

- Call the destination and ask what's around them
- Those street-finder books
- RIPTA has a booth you can go to downtown where you can get any kind of bus schedules, maps, any information you need.

Abu: You mentioned before Pleasant Street is high traffic, a lot of kids there, a lot of traffic. Are there any signs there?

- Not enough
- The kids play all over the place, but the cars still come screaming through there
- We tried to petition Kevin Jackson to get speed bumps and slow signs, but nothing happened

Abu: Are there other streets around here like Pleasant Street?

- Yeah, Abbott Street, there's a lot of children
- That ain't going to change.
- Every street over here is bad now, Evergreen, Peach, every street.

Abu: Somebody mentioned speed bumps on Pleasant Street?

- We petitioned them for speed bumps, and to make it a one-way street, but it still hasn't happened.
- We got over 160 signatures.
- Kevin Jackson got it.
- My sister lived on Miller Street, and it took them four years to get it a one-way street, but it is now.

Abu: In this area, are there any traffic-calming things like speed bumps?

Everyone responds "no."

Abu: All right, is there anything we didn't talk about tonight that you would like to bring up about transportation?

- Handicapped access; how many buses that travel Camp Street are handicapped-accessible? I know some of them aren't, and I've never seen one on Camp Street.
- My mother can't take the bus because she can't lift her foot this high [6 inches] off the ground, but a handicapped-accessible bus would make that possible for her.
- I know half the time, those lift things don't even work. So the handicapped people have to stand there and wait, hopefully for another one, that can get them up on that lift.
- And sometimes if they are already on the bus and the lift breaks, they can't get off. If they have those lifts, they should work all the time.
- Some kids can actually take their bikes because they have those bike racks on the buses, but the bus doesn't make that available in this area. Kids should be able to take the bus from here to the bike trail, buses should be available for him to do that, to get through traffic safely and enjoy that activity.
- My daughter rides a school bus, and there are days where her and her friend, they catch the bus at 7:00, and they wait and wait and the bus never shows. I called the bus yard and they have no explanation for me. I want to know if there is a way we can know if a bus is running late. One day the bus driver told me the bus had been two hours late in the morning. Now, if one of our kids went to school 2 hours late, they'd be in trouble.
- My grandson goes to day care, and the school bus picks him up there and takes him to the school. They've been late, they have left him at the school. Once they were late, and I caught them, and my grandson was the only child on the bus. *They were going to take him to the bus depot.* They were so inconsistent. And he's not the only one who's had this experience.
- My children, when they took the bus, they won't let the kids have the windows open, no air conditioning, broiling hot, kids go to school with headaches.
- And there are no seat belts on the bus.

Abu: We can take one more comment because in three minutes, it will be 7:30.

- I read something that said diesel fumes are carcinogenic, and they recommend kids ride on buses with all the windows open. How many kids do you think get to actually have that? The drivers just won't let them. How many of the city buses are diesel, and are we exposing ourselves to that?

Abu concluded the focus group at 7:30 p.m. sharp. He reminded folks to speak with Katie and Shelley, call the phone numbers on the resource list, and thanked them for coming. Katie passed out resource materials and other forms.

Mount Hope Neighborhood Association

Focus Group Highlights and Recommendations

Modes of Transportation

- ✓ Participants mentioned many means for traveling, but the majority noted public transportation, walking, and alternative modes (agency vans and friends or relatives' cars) as the primary means of transportation.
- ✓ ***Almost all of the participants take the bus*** because they don't own cars and cannot afford other means of transportation, most notably taxis and don't want to go downtown with cars because of the lack of parking.
- ✓ ***People choose alternative forms of transportation***, even though it may be expensive (taxi) or inconvenient (relying on friends or relatives) or choose not to go out at all if it is public transportation is considered unavailable or inconvenient.
- ✓ ***Some individuals can take advantage of transportation provided by Mount Hope to go shopping***. This is limited since the transportation is provided during the week and not on weekends when many would prefer to go shopping.

Accessibility, Reliability, Comfort and Safety

- ✓ Buses stops may be considered reasonably close or too far away depending upon their place of residence.
- ✓ Participants complained most about not being able to use public transportation or finding public transportation inconvenient during ***bad weather, or during the mid-day, evenings and/or weekends when the buses run infrequently or not at all***.
- ✓ Many people feel the ***bus routes and schedules are inadequate*** to go to places they consider important, e.g., Miriam Hospital or the supermarket.
- ✓ Many consider the ***buses reliable and to run on schedule***.
- ✓ Participants appreciate the posted schedules in Kennedy Plaza.
- ✓ They expressed a great deal of ***concern about the safety of passengers*** on the bus as well as those getting on and off the bus.
- ✓ They also remarked that the ***bus stops do not have adequate shelters*** to protect them from inclement weather.

Customer Service (RIPTA bus drivers)

- ✓ Participants expressed great emotion and concern about the ***poor attitudes and inferior customer service received from the bus drivers***. This concern was especially extended for the handicapped and the elderly. Examples of poor service included not stopping for passengers at stops, arrogance, lack of assistance for the elderly and/or handicapped, non-enforcement of bus policies.
- ✓ The participants also gave ***specific examples of good bus driver customer service***, which included personal courtesy and assistance.

Affordability of Public Transportation

- ✓ Overall participants considered the ***fares too expensive***.
- ✓ Participants expressed ***concern about the cost of transportation for children/students and poor families***.

Walking and Biking for Exercise and Recreation

- ✓ Several participants discussed ***walking and biking for exercise*** during favorable weather.

- ✓ Participants mentioned that they *walk around the neighborhood or to other "safe areas"* such as Blackstone Boulevard or Hope High School Track (locked at present).
- ✓ Participants are *aware of bike paths*, such as in India Park.
- ✓ *Transportation to a safe location to bike* is an issue, especially for children.

Driving Destinations and Road Conditions

- ✓ Those who use private vehicles use them for every purpose.
- ✓ Participants perceive the road conditions to be poor, particularly the *"potholes."*
- ✓ Participants also perceive that the *pothole problem does not exist in more affluent neighborhoods* or streets, e.g., Blackstone Boulevard, Angell Street, Waterman Street, certain parts of Hope Street, etc.
- ✓ Some *street corners are poorly marked* and confusing for motorists (Larch and Abbott, North Main and Cypress) and susceptible to accidents.
- ✓ When traveling in unfamiliar areas, there are *missing street signs*.

Pedestrian Safety

- ✓ They also expressed concern about the generally ***poorly lit condition of the streets*** if people are walking to and from bus stops or other destinations.
- ✓ Another safety concern included *snow removal and icy sidewalks*. When conditions are particularly poor, children and elderly must walk in the street. *Kennedy Plaza was cited as a safety concern* for students.
- ✓ Participants observe *cars speeding on streets where children play*.
- ✓ Residents have requested (signed petitions) that *speed bumps* be constructed and some streets designated as "one-way," with no results.

Participant Recommendations:

- ▶▶ "Every hospital in the city has bus service to the door...we need to have easy accessible transportation to our local hospital and to Shaw's Plaza."
- ▶▶ "Mount Hope (agency van) comes and takes us one day a week, but they take 'em to Stop and Shop, and they want to also go to Shaw's. So I ask for two days a week, one to Stop and Shop, one to Shaw's."
- ▶▶ "I like the schedules posted down in Kennedy Plaza. It would be nice if we had them up all the time, at more places...They should keep those schedules up...So convenient."
- ▶▶ "Bus drivers should not allow people to cut in from of the bus...When that bus stop, they should have a stop sign like school buses that swings out and stops traffic."
- ▶▶ "Bus drivers shouldn't allow too many people on the bus. "
- ▶▶ "Snow removal..."
- ▶▶ "Safety at Kennedy Plaza for the students."
- ▶▶ "Student bus passes...the system should serve kids."
- ▶▶ "Nonprofits should get some money for bus passes to disseminate to our clients, for poor families."
- ▶▶ "Handicapped access.... I've never seen one on Camp Street....My mother can't take the bus...but a handicapped-accessible bus would make that possible for her."
- ▶▶ "Some kids can actually take their bikes because they have those bike racks on the buses, but the bus doesn't make that available in this area."

2. Joslin Community Center

February 13, 2001

Facilitating: Pam Zappardino

Recording/Notetaking: Siana Collyer

Translator: Rosaria

The focus group began at 6:30 p.m. Pam Zappardino began by introducing herself. Pam and Rosaria explained to the attendees that they had been asked to the group to provide their input and comments about transportation in the city of Providence. They emphasized that the group's purpose is to collect the feedback of people just like them to improve the transportation that isn't working. The Providence Plan will use their input to implement plans and improvements in transportation.

Pam and Rosaria explained the purpose of taping the session, and asked if the group granted their permission to be taped. She explained that the only purpose of this is ensuring that Siana can record everyone's feedback accurately. She assured the group that their comments would not be matched with their names/identities. No one had any objections to the session being taped.

Pam had Shelley, Katie, and George introduced themselves and explained their reasons for feeling it was important to come here to support needs of community around transportation. The attendees also introduced themselves.

Constituent / Participant Group: Family

Pam: Maybe you could tell me what are all the different ways you used in the last year to get around the city?

- RIPTA
- Rides with co-workers
- RIDE
- Ride with brother
- My car

Pam: Do you take the bus to work? To anywhere else, or mainly to work?

- Just about everywhere
- Run errands
- Doctors' appointments
- Get around

Pam: What are some good things about public transportation? How well does the bus system work?

- I believe public transportation is good. They always treat me well. I ride with my kids. When you come to this country and you don't have money to own your own car, public transportation is important.
- People I know who use public transportation seem happy with the service

Pam: Is the bus affordable? Is it OK, or are there problems with what it costs to take the bus?

- The price should be less, especially if you use the bus to go to work. But in this country you have laws, you have to pay.
- It should be free.

Pam: Is this bus comfortable? Is it easy to get on and off?

- It's OK, the times I've been on.
- It's clean, it's comfortable.

Pam: Do you feel like the buses and routes get you where you need to go?

- One of my office staff was saying that there isn't service from Academy all the way to Mt. Pleasant more than once an hour, and after a point it doesn't travel all the way up Atwells Ave.
- The bus leaves you too far away; or else I have to go downtown to Kennedy Plaza to get somewhere else.
- The wait is too long.

Pam: You brought up a long wait. Does the bus schedule work for your schedule? Can you get a bus when you need to get it?

- I feel like it takes too long
- The bus doesn't come when it says it is coming on the schedule
- Long wait in between buses.
- You have to catch a really early bus in order to catch the bus that runs to Johnston that will get you there on time for work.
- There is no bus stop that is covered (by a shelter).
- I'm handicapped. A lot of bus drivers need to change their attitude. I can't see the top of the bus, and when I ask them the route number on their bus, they tell me to read the sign on the bus. And they have to be more patient with the elderly.
- Level of intolerance on buses [by bus drivers] is outrageous.

Pam: If you had to get somewhere outside of your normal routine, are the bus schedules easy to figure out? Are people willing to help you out?

- Depends on the time of day
- Depends if you're going into Kennedy Plaza

Pam: So it's not just the route, but the time...

- And the day. Some buses don't go into certain neighborhoods on Sundays.
- When I call RIPTA, it's very busy. You have to wait a long time. It is difficult.
- That automated system is very helpful if you know the number of the route you need to take. It's hard to find a "live" person to talk to. Sometimes I know the street but not the route number, so I am stuck.

Pam: Terrie, you mentioned you participate in the RIDE program? What has your experience been with that service?

Terrie: They have minibuses for handicapped and seniors. They provide us transportation, and give out the jobs to other companies too. But you have to give RIDE 3 to 4 weeks' notice, and they come and pick you up. Then when you're done wherever you are, you call them and they give you an hour and come pick you up. There is also the ADA service. If you need to go to shopping or the doctor, it costs \$2.50 going and coming back. So it's up to the person if you can afford the \$5, if you can afford to do that. Usually you're the only one on the bus.

Pam: So that program works well for your needs?

Terrie: Yes, it's a big relief. I don't have to run to catch a bus, plus I can't see so well. It's a big relief.

Pam: I bet.

Rosaria: Which is better? [Referring to RIDE vs. the ADA service.]

Terrie: They're both good.

Gia: And you have to be a senior and/or handicapped?

Terrie (nodding): And/or.

Pam: If you were going to give the state suggestions to really improve the bus service in Providence, what would you tell them?

- Treat the people better. Be more kind, show them more courtesy.
- Be more kind to the customers.
- More buses at night.
- Improved safety.

Pam: Is safety a concern with taking the bus?

- The long waiting is a concern. You don't know what kind of people there are out there. Forty-five minutes is a long wait; it makes me afraid.
- I feel afraid when I have to transport my children on public transportation. I'm afraid someone might take them.

Pam: Do your children use the buses on their own to get around?

- No, they only ride the bus with me.
- My son uses the bus. He only uses it to go to school, and we live on Main Avenue, there are a lot of buses.

Pam: Now, moving on to Mr. Garcia's way of travel [he had previously indicated that he drives], do you drive mainly in the city, or to other places in the state?

- I only go far away.

Pam: In the city, what is the traffic like? How about the roads? Do you like driving in the city? Are there any problems?

- I have a problem with the traffic, when the bus takes over the run, pulls right out in front of me.

Pam: How are the signs on the road? Can you tell where you need to go by looking at them?

- I drive a Caravan. And the lights are so high up that I have to do this [leans far sideways] to see them. If you are far back in traffic, it's OK. But it's an issue to try and see the light if you are right at an intersection.
- The road signs are OK to me.
- In the winter, when they don't plow the roads well, the lines and signs on the road ---painted on the road---are erased, you can't see them. They should constantly make clear those lines. In Shaw's parking lot, the handicapped signs are not clear at all.
- How about potholes? I know the city cannot address them aggressively, but something should be done in a more expedient fashion. If we all charged the city for the damage to our cars...
- Sometimes the road near the drainage grates is so far down. I popped my tires.

Pam: Everyone has to walk...how do you feel about walking in Providence? How is the shape of the sidewalks? Do you feel safe walking in the city?

- It depends on where you walk. Olneyville, downtown, the East Side
- Olneyville needs improvement
- The sidewalks are in pretty rough shape in Olneyville
- During the summer I take walks with my children. The sidewalks seem to be in pretty good shape.

Pam: Do you feel safe in your neighborhoods? Downtown?

- I believe it is sometimes safe downtown.
- I don't feel safe downtown. There are some places around here I will walk to when it's light, but in the dark, I won't walk home.
- In the winter, it's not safe when people won't clear the snow from in front; it turns to ice. The mayor should pay people to clean the snow.

Pam: Does anyone walk for fun or exercise, or just to get from one place to another?

- To work only
- Only walk because we have to, not for fun
- Our priest walks everywhere, even at night. Evidently he is not afraid.
- It is dangerous to walk when drivers try to pass each other on a narrow street.

Pam: It's 7:30. I've been asking all the questions. Are there other things regarding transportation that you want the state to know about?

- The bus drivers' treatment of their customers should be better. For the money we pay, it should be better.
- The community groups are trying to work with police on speeding cars and loud music. But they're not getting very far.
- It always amazes me; when they makes corrections to the bus lines and schedules, what is it in response to? Are they polling individuals who actually take the bus? It should be a response to the people who take it. It might be a good idea to go to a few different stops on a route and see what people think.

Katie: Do people ever use bicycles?

- Yes.
- No
- No

Katie: If there were more bike paths or lanes, would you use them?

- Yes, absolutely.

Katie passed out some materials, and she, Pam, and Rosaria thanked everyone for coming. The meeting ended at 7:34 p.m.

Joslin Community Center

Focus Group Highlights and Recommendations

Modes of Transportation

- ✓ Participants mentioned several means for traveling, but the majority *noted public transportation, cars and alternative modes* (RIDE vans and friends or relatives' cars) as the primary means of transportation.
- ✓ *Walking* is seen primarily as a means to an end, sometimes *to work*.

Accessibility, Reliability, Comfort and Safety

- ✓ Participants generally feel that public transportation is good and an important service, especially for those who cannot afford a car.
- ✓ They report that *friends also seem happy* with the service.
- ✓ They also rate the buses as *clean and comfortable*.
- ✓ Participants believe that the *bus routes leave them too far from their destinations*.
- ✓ Some feel that *the wait for certain buses is too long* (an hour or more) and it *becomes a safety concern*.
- ✓ Some *buses don't run according to the posted schedule*.
- ✓ Some *stops don't have a shelter*.
- ✓ Bus drivers are often *not patient with handicapped and the elderly*.
- ✓ *Weekend and evening service is inadequate*.
- ✓ The *RIDE service is particularly helpful* for seniors and handicapped

Customer Service

- Concern about the *impatience and lack of tolerance received from the bus drivers*.
- This concern was *especially extended for the handicapped and the elderly*.
- *Automated information system is difficult* without the bus route number.

Affordability of Transportation

- ✓ Overall participants considered the *fares too expensive especially if used to go to work*.
- ✓ Participant cited cost for *RIDE may be too expensive* for some

Walking and Biking for Exercise and Recreation

- ✓ Participants *did not view walking as exercise*.
- ✓ If bike paths or lanes were available, participants would use them.

Driving Destinations and Road Conditions

- ✓ *Buses sometimes are driven dangerously*.
- ✓ *Potholes should be repaired* more expediently.

Pedestrian Safety

- ✓ Certain areas of the city need *sidewalk maintenance* (Olneyville); *others are fine*.
- ✓ Participants generally don't feel safe downtown.
- ✓ Others *will not walk home at night*.
- ✓ Narrow streets and *reckless driving makes walking dangerous*.

Participant Recommendations:

- » "The price should be less, especially if you use the bus to go to work."
- » "It should be free."
- » "Treat the People better. Be more kind, show them more courtesy (RIPTA)."
- » " More buses at night."
- » "Improved safety."
- » "In the winter...they should constantly make clear those lines (in the road)."
- » "How about potholes...I know the city cannot address them aggressively, but something should be done in a more expedient fashion."
- » "In the winter, it's not safe...the mayor should pay people to clean the snow."
- » "The bus drivers' treatment of their customers should be better."
- » "The community groups are trying to work with police on speeding cars and loud music."
- » "It always amazes me; when they make corrections to the bus lines and schedules, what is it in response to...It might be a good idea to go to a few different stops on a route and see what people think."
- » *If there were more bike paths or lanes, would you use them?* "Yes, absolutely."

3. Westminster Senior Center

February 14, 2001

Facilitating: Abu Bakr

Notetaking: Pam Zappardino

The recording equipment was not working for this session, so notes are limited. The focus group highlights and participant recommendations section is eliminated.

Constituent / Participant Group: Elderly / Disabled

One of the problems we have: with the buses to Kennedy Plaza; we have to walk.

How we get around:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ➤ Walk | ➤ Van |
| ➤ Get a relative to drive us | ➤ Bus or trolley (every ten minutes) |
| ➤ Cab | ➤ Fly |
| ➤ Couple of us still drive | ➤ In bad weather we can't go out |

About taking the bus:

- ✓ Construction problems
- ✓ They never shovel the snow at the bus shelters; we stand in the street; it's dangerous
- ✓ The bus stop is a block away from the center
- ✓ Most people live close to a bus stop
- ✓ Some people use RIDE services
- ✓ Group would like the RIDE bus to pick up and come to the senior center
- ✓ There should be an income guideline for RIPTA bus passes, esp. for low-income people
- ✓ Sometimes the bus doesn't come right to the curb, so we have to walk in the street.

We use the bus to get to:

- ✓ Hospital
- ✓ Downtown
- ✓ Shopping

Those with canes or walkers on the accessibility of the buses:

- ✓ I/we have trouble
- ✓ Bus drivers are not always cooperative
- ✓ Some bus drivers don't put that last step down
- ✓ Sometimes the last step is broken
- ✓ Some bus drivers don't know about the last step or think they are only for wheelchairs

Comments on courteous bus drivers:

- ✓ Some drivers are very nice and helpful
- ✓ Many people reported that bus drivers would wait for them if they saw them coming or trying to catch the bus

Comments on unpleasant bus drivers:

- ✓ One bus driver was on "express," wouldn't stop for me
- ✓ Bus driver called me stupid and let me off the bus when I said I was going to be sick

How we find out how to get somewhere:

- ✓ Bus schedule
- ✓ Call RIPTA, but the phone menus are very confusing
- ✓ You have to know the number of the bus when you call the automated line
- ✓ I go into the booth on Washington Street that says “RIPTA”
- ✓ I can’t understand the menus
- ✓ I have to wait for a human to come on the line when I call RIPTA. Then I don’t have a problem.
- ✓ Many people thought that they had to use the automated system; they don’t wait on the line long enough to hear that they have the option to speak with a person.

Regarding using the bus at night:

- ✓ None of us use it at night
- ✓ It’s not safe
- ✓ At night, we get someone to take us somewhere

Group’s suggestions regarding buses:

- ✓ More trolleys around downtown
- ✓ Pull the buses up closer to the sidewalks
- ✓ Have buses come close to meal sites

Comments on walking in Providence:

- ✓ Snow and ice
- ✓ There’s a lot of construction downtown and elsewhere, from Kennedy Plaza to Matthewson Center
- ✓ The curbs are hard to negotiate; we often walk in the street
- ✓ Sometimes the curb cuts the work; this year it is very icy
- ✓ The bricks in the ground are not even
- ✓ Businesses could help by shoveling their sidewalks
- ✓ RIPTA should shovel the bus shelters
- ✓ A lot of cars turn on a red light. If you’re trying to cross the street, you’re taking your life in your own hands. It’s the worst downtown.
- ✓ I don’t take the buses anymore. I take the RIDE vans. [Comment interspersed in the “walking” dialogue.]
- ✓ I can’t afford the RIDE vans. [Comment interspersed in the “walking” dialogue.]
- ✓ The length of the stoplights is too short for pedestrians to cross
- ✓ The RIPTA map is hard to read for the average person. [Comment interspersed in the “walking” dialogue.]

Suggestions made by attendees present at this focus group:

- ▶▶ There are so many senior centers in Providence. How about if there were a few vans or trolleys specifically for the senior centers?
- ▶▶ The RIDE vans are easy to board and leave.
- ▶▶ For shopping, most of us use the RIDE vans
- ▶▶ Some of us use markets that deliver (for our grocery shopping)
- ▶▶ One person uses buses (for shopping) and says this is “OK”
- ▶▶ RIDE is \$2.50 each way, or \$100 a month for our transportation needs
- ▶▶ The brick and concrete downtown is uneven. It’s hard to walk.
- ▶▶ Why can’t they drop us off where we want?
- ▶▶ Need more awareness by bus drivers to help elderly people; is it a fear of liability that they don’t help us more?

4. Job Link

February 15, 2001

Facilitating: Pamela Zappardino

Pam introduced herself, and asked the attendees to introduce themselves. Once everyone did introductions, Pam began facilitating the evening's group.

Constituent / Participant Group: Job Seekers

Pam: What are the different ways you get around the city?

- Bus
- Walk
- Car
- Cabs

Pam: I want to take a look at each one of those types of transportation as we go around. I heard the most responses with "Bus." So, what works well about the bus system?

- There's more than one bus that goes to the same stop.
- Handicapped lift
- A lot of buses go into different places
- Most of them [drivers] are polite

Pam: What about the ones [drivers] that aren't polite?

Woman: I still get on 'em [their buses]! [Group laughter.]

Pam: When you're thinking about taking the bus, you get up in the morning and have to take a bus, how do you feel?

- Figure out what time the bus comes
- I'm thinking, *oh, I don't wanna take that bus!*
- It's a lot, holding a baby, holding a carriage, and trying to get on the bus.

Pam: So it doesn't sound like you get up saying, "I can't wait to get on the bus!! It's so much fun to take the bus!!!" [People laugh, say "nooo."] **When you take the bus, where do you go?**

- Downtown
- To work
- To doctor's appointments
- To school

Pam: So pretty much you're taking the bus for anything you need to do. Does anyone take the bus to go shopping?

- Yeah.
- I do.
- I'll take the bus to the supermarket, but I take a cab back.
- The bus wouldn't stop for me once, went right past, I had my hands full.

Pam: Some of you said you take the bus to work or to school. How does the bus schedule fit with the times you need to be places?

- You have to take an early bus
- Better leave an hour before your appointment
- Right where I live there's a bus stop, but there are a lot of kids on the bus. So I have to stand, and that's not comfortable when you're pregnant.

Pam: It sounds like you have to allow an awful lot of time to make sure you will be on time. Now I know Job Link is a program that's helping you get ready to take different jobs. Have you used the bus to get to interviews or look for jobs?

- Before I came to Job Link, I had to take the bus to my job every day.
- Now I have to take the bus to look for a job or find a job or interview
- We do have a van that will take people to an interview or an appointment.

Pam: So right now a lot of you rely on the Job Link van, and I'm getting a lot of smiles when I mention the Job Link van! That sounds like it's been helpful, but after you're finished with the Job Link program, you may have to go back to using the bus. Do any of you try to take a bus outside of the city?

- Woonsocket
- To the theaters

Pam: Is that easy and convenient?

- Certain times, I guess.
- I stand out a long time there waiting for it to come by.
- As long as you catch the bus, you're OK. They sometimes only come by every hour and a half. If you miss the bus, forget it.

Pam: And how about weekends?

- Oh, forget it!
- There's no bus on weekends.
- It's like a holiday schedule, the weekends.
- I take the trolley, so it comes every ten minutes.

Pam: So it sounds like the trolley, if it's going where you need to go, is better scheduling and easier to deal with than the buses. OK, we got a couple of mentions earlier about the bus drivers being mostly courteous. Let's talk about maybe some of the problems you've had?

- I had a bus driver close the door on my foot, coming off the bus.
- When you get on with your baby and the carriage, before I can sit down, he's taking off.
- That happens a lot
- Last month I had my bus pass from welfare, but I forgot that I had to get a new one, and I had to bring my baby to the clinic. The driver says, "you know this is no good?" And I said to him, "give me a chance, it's raining, I have to bring my baby to the doctor." He told me no, and threw me out of the bus.
- I get on the bus and he doesn't wait for me to sit down.
- They're never on time.
- You have a little one, a baby, and they make you want to scream
- The drivers stop to talk to people or they stop to get coffee, they hold up traffic
- They're supposed to let me on with my daughter, and my buss pass says I can get on with one child, and sometimes they fight with me, they tell my 3-year old daughter to pay!
- The buses go pretty fast, and if they don't see anyone in that "hub," they keep going. Sometimes the people run after the bus, I don't think the drivers could see them, they go so fast.
- There's a retirement home across the street, and when the old folks try to cross, the buses are zooming by.
- I got hurt trying to run after the bus, I hurt my ankle.
- Some of the bus drivers lie and say the lift is not broken. Some handicapped people are outside for a couple hours. Even when people on the bus volunteer to help the person get on the bus, the driver says, "sit down," and keeps going.

- Somebody's kid had an accident, and the driver said they have to take him off the bus because it's going to stain the seats, smell it up. I got on another bus downtown, and that driver was talking about it to another driver, then some guy got on the bus, said he messed himself, and the driver told him just wrap his jacket around his waist. After he was just talking junk about that girl's little boy peeing on the bus!

Pam: We were at the Westminster Senior Center yesterday talking to some older folks, and they were saying a lot of the things you're saying. They have trouble with the buses, a lot of trouble with the drivers. What about the cost?

- Too much.
- Definitely too much.
- That's ridiculous, the price. I go to St. Joe's a lot, and if my bus pass expires, to pay a buck-twenty-five to go a couple of blocks, that makes no sense.
- If you're going a certain distance, it should be a certain amount.
- All senior citizens should have free bus passes.

Pam: What are the conditions of the buses?

- A lot of the seats are broken
- They did upgrade a lot of the buses, though
- Some of them do have comfortable seats

Pam: For the most part do you find a bus to take you where you need to go?

- Yeah.

Pam: And if you needed to go someplace new, and you weren't sure how to get there, is it easy to find out how to take a bus to a new place?

- Mmm-hmm
- When you call it's automated, so you just press the numbers.
- They told me some wrong information about the buses on Commercial Way

Pam: I heard that sometimes when you call that automated line, you need to know the bus number?

- Right
- And what if you don't know the bus number?
- You can press "2" if you don't know the bus number

Pam: So you kind of have to get through this menu of bus information to find out certain things. Are there times when you wouldn't take the bus?

- Late night
- If the bus is too full
- If a storm is out

Pam: Does anybody take a bus at night?

- I don't
- I have taken the bus at night
- I did once. I won't again, though.
- Since they changed the bus stops, the bus stops behind City Hall. That's like an alleyway, you don't want to be standing back there.
- It's dark on some of those streets

Pam: It sounds like you really don't feel too safe at night taking the buses. What about the schedules at night?

- They change after a certain hour
- Yeah, that's the thing I don't like
- They change everything
- It's really confusing. Sometimes they switch where they stop after dark.
- I'll walk before I'll catch the bus sometimes
- Somebody told me the wrong information about what time a bus comes and when. Somebody could come and do something to my daughter and me. It's not funny.
- They need to definitely throw out the old schedules. I was on the bus and asked the driver if I could have a schedule, he said, "oh, no, don't take that, it's the old schedule." I said, "well, do you have some new ones?" He said not yet, and I told him he better throw those out because someone could take one, but be waiting for the bus at the wrong time.

Pam: Are there other ideas you have? Because that's a suggestion we can pass on, make sure all the schedules are up-to-date.

- In Los Angeles, they have signs that tell you which bus numbers stop there, and an asterisk that tells you whether the bus runs after a certain time.
- There are a lot of people that are afraid to talk to other people, so it would make people feel more secure to see a posted bus schedule
- And to see that they are at the right stop, that says where the bus is going
- Maybe the bus drivers themselves need to take some kind of in-house training such as "how to deal with the community." Just like the police and hospitals going through seminars to change their attitude toward the community, how to deal with different situations. I think it would be really helpful. For example, Maria's situation, her child was sick, it was raining, common decency should kick in on the part of the bus drivers. I think some kind of in-house training...
- I agree. There is some kind of assumption among the bus drivers that you know everything already. What if I'm a first-time bus rider? I don't want to be afraid to ask questions. I couldn't imagine what an old person might feel like. I don't feel like the bus drivers have a lot of sensitivity.
- You trust the bus drivers with your safety.
- There's people that work there for so long, they belong to a union, they get used to it, they're overworked. Maybe within the bus company themselves they need to make some changes, reduce the overtime. Make the drivers happier.
- The bus drivers don't wait for the elderly people to sit down before they start moving. And people don't get up for the elderly people to sit down.
- The bus drivers themselves are probably scared to say something to someone on the bus. I'm sure there's been bus drivers assaulted and spit on and cursed at. Maybe it would be a chain reaction. Maybe if the bus drivers had some training on how to deal with these changes, it could start to change.
- Some of the drivers are nice, some are awful, and all mouth.
- Put a security guard, a police officer on the bus.
- The guard could tell kids to give the seat to the elderly.

Pam: Maybe we could shift gears a bit...let's talk about walking, because a lot of you said you walk a lot around the city. Do you find the sidewalks in decent condition, if you're walking with a stroller...?

- No, it's uneven
- It's icy; the businesses don't plow their sidewalks
- Who's responsible for the sidewalks in front of a business? It's the businesses themselves, right? Maybe the city should fine them.
- Some people take their strollers in the street, because the plows put everything on the sidewalks
- It's really rough trying to be on the sidewalk.

- You can't even lift those big boulders of ice sometimes.
- Somebody does not check those streets
- Sometimes I walk in the street, and the elderly people they do, too.

Pam: When it's not snowy and icy, do you find it OK to walk on the sidewalks? Do you feel safe walking around?

- No
- Ain't safe nowhere
- Somebody could run up behind you. It happens so quickly.
- It *happens*.

Pam: Does anybody walk for fun, or to get exercise?

- Can you repeat that?!

Pam: If the city were to have walking paths, would you use them with your kids just to get outside?

- I like to walk, if it's nice out
- I don't see it fitting in a community where you see a lot of people and their kids on bicycles and tricycles
- It's not safe here. It's too dangerous.
- In my neighborhood, there's nothing to do.
- There's a lot of bottles and glass.
- I live right between two liquor stores. I don't want my daughter walking on Broad Street, so I don't walk on Broad Street.
- I won't buy my daughter a bike, because I don't want her riding around here.
- There's nothing for our kids.

Miscellaneous comments about Broad Street:

- Broad Street is terrible.
- Last year they had my daughter's bus stop in front of the liquor store. It opens at 6, 7 a.m.---even before the candy store!
- Every third car they stop you, the police do.

Pam: Do any of you have kids that ride the buses on their own?

- No
- I don't trust that
- My daughter, if she misses her school bus, I make her take the city bus.

Pam: And how do they find that?

- It's fun for them
- I always tell my daughter, "sit near the bus driver, don't talk to nobody."
- My daughter takes the bus, then another one to Hope High School. I know what the schedule is.
- I think the bus should be free for little kids.
- After 7 or 9 years old, they should have to pay for those kids.
- I think after 7 years old you do.

Pam: When you drive, where do you go in the city? What do you use your cars for?

- South Attleboro area
- To go to work
- It's a nightmare on the highway
- The little side roads are ridiculous, too.

- I go everywhere. Out to eat, to the mall. But I don't drive at night anymore. I had a flat, sat outside, and had to wait, I was so afraid.
- That happened to me, too. But there was no way I would have stopped on the highway with my daughter. She was a little baby.
- They have that CVS Samaritan van. They stopped for me on the highway, and it was such a relief.

Pam: Whether you're driving or walking, do you find that the street signs are helpful? Are they adequate?

- I think so
- Yes
- Sometimes you can see the signs for the side streets
- More signs or big signs across the street every few blocks so you know where you are. They have that in L.A. And they have "10 to 20 Hill Street" or whatever. They have a numbering system; it really helps with traffic flow.

Pam: Other things about driving?

- Some people need to go back to driving school.
- A lot of road rage.
- Licenses today go for five years, in that time someone could lose their vision or something. It should really be checked at certain points
- They should check the older folks. They peer over the steering wheel.
- And they (the elderly) swerve around on the highway.
- I think the areas where people cross the street need to be more visible, and maybe more publicity about stopping at them. There are no signs that work for the pedestrians. It's scary here.
- There's not a lot of crosswalks on Broad Street at all.
- In certain states they have those things in the middle of the road that say, "It's against the law..."
- Some people just speed right by those.
- The buttons you press to cross the street just don't work. I just don't trust them.
- There's that one crosswalk on Thurbers----my house shakes. There's not one other crosswalk on Thurbers.
- All the school buses come through our street, and they're not driving slowly.
- This bus took off and went around the corner so fast, it looked like the bus took the corner on its side. I've seen a lot of school buses driving extremely fast. I think a lot of the reason for that, I think the RIDE transportation are hiring off the hook. They're training people, but it's such a short training period and then you start driving the bus. School bus drivers have been driving very recklessly, very dangerously.

Pam: In some of the neighborhoods, I know they've built some of the sidewalks out, and put things with trees in the middle---

- What's the point of that??
- I don't like that
- I think that's dangerous
- What if the fire department needs to get through?
- It's like that on every street
- It's not safe. Some people still go zooming through.
- You leave one street, and sometimes the fire hydrant is not right on the corner.
- Why did they put it there? [Katie explains that it's called "traffic calming" and is meant to slow down the traffic.] But people park on both sides of the street, and the fire trucks have to go through the middle. If there's a fire truck, it can't get through!

- Messer Street used to be a two lane and now it's a one-lane. What happens in 25 years and those trees grow? What's going to happen to the street? It has made it so much narrower already; what happens in the future?

Pam: Are there other things we haven't talked about lately that you feel is important?

- One suggestion I have is about the highway. In the rain, on the highway, you can't see the white lines. I think it should be mandatory that you can always see them, with those reflectors or something else. In New Hampshire it's like that.
- The white strips on the roads are so hard to see.
- If there is an accident on the highway, put a marquee about a mile before telling people to keep left or right or wherever; asking them to keep moving.
- When you come off the exit from the mall, and the highways merge into each other, people speed into each other. How come they don't have a yield sign or a stop sign?
- Someone should tell the drivers merging onto the highway to "yield." They don't have the right of way, and threaten the drivers on the highway.
- People in this community need bright lights. The women here are afraid, but if you know there's light, you're not going to be as afraid. We would really welcome that for our children, for ourselves. The higher crime areas, this area.
- Cameras? Video cameras.
- Our kids can't play outside, cause the cars go screaming through the street, with the music so loud. They can't hear any kid who might shout, "stop!" My street is a kid street, but they don't care.
- Speed bumps. They won't drive down our streets. It would be so nice.
- Is there someone we can write to? They wasted all that money on the skating rink and the mall, things we don't need. [Pam explains that Katie will pass out some information for them with resources.]

Katie passed out some maps, resource materials, and explanations about the statewide transportation planning.

Job Link

Focus Group Highlights and Recommendations

Modes of Transportation

- ✓ Participants mentioned several means for traveling, but the majority *noted public transportation, walking, cars and alternative modes* (Job Link van)
- ✓ *Walking* is seen primarily as a means to an end, sometimes *to work*.

Accessibility, Reliability, Comfort and Safety

- ✓ More than one bus stops at the same stop
- ✓ Buses have *multiple destinations*
- ✓ The *handicap lift* is helpful
- ✓ The *bus stop is close by*
- ✓ *Often have to stand* because the bus is crowded
- ✓ *Bus travel takes a long time* and must leave very early to make an appointment
- ✓ Take a *bus to the supermarket, but a cab home*
- ✓ The wait can be as long as *1 1/2 hours*.
- ✓ *Bus service on the weekends is inadequate*.
- ✓ *Schedules and bus stops change* after a certain hour.
- ✓ *The trolley comes often* - every ten minutes.
- ✓ *Never on time*
- ✓ Drivers *drive too fast*
- ✓ Drivers are *inconsiderate of handicapped passengers*.
- ✓ *Drivers take off* before passengers have stepped safely off the bus or *before passengers sit*.
- ✓ Some have *comfortable seats*; some have *broken seats*.
- ✓ *Downtown locations* during Kennedy Plaza construction are *not safe*.
- ✓ Need more *security on the buses*.
- ✓

Customer Service

- ✓ Most of the *drivers are polite*
- ✓ Driver wouldn't stop
- ✓ Drivers are *inconsiderate of handicapped passengers*.
- ✓ *Drivers take off* before passengers have stepped safely off the bus or *before passengers sit*.
- ✓ The *automated system is easy* to use if you know the system.
- ✓ Drivers *don't know "how to deal with the community."*
- ✓ Drivers are *insensitive*.

Affordability of Transportation

- ✓ Price is *definitely too much*.
- ✓ All *senior citizens should have free bus passes*.
- ✓ *Short rides should not cost \$1.25*.
- ✓ *Bus should be free for kids*

Walking and Biking for Exercise and Recreation

- ✓ *Walking is dangerous* in certain areas.
- ✓ *Afraid to have children ride bikes* in certain areas

Driving Destinations and Road Conditions

- ✓ A "nightmare" on the highways.
- ✓ *Afraid to drive at night* because of fear of breakdown.
- ✓ *CVS Samaritan van* is a tremendous relief on the highway.
- ✓ *More signage* would be helpful.
- ✓ *Traffic calming* construction may be *potentially dangerous*.

Pedestrian Safety

- ✓ Sidewalks are *icy*
- ✓ Snowy and icy sidewalks force *some using strollers* are forced to *wheel their children in the streets*.
- ✓ *More crosswalks and signs* protecting pedestrians

Participant Recommendations:

- ▶▶ "They need to definitely throw out the old schedules....because someone could take one, but be waiting for the bus at the wrong time."
- ▶▶ "It would make people feel more secure to see a posted bus schedule."
- ▶▶ "Maybe the bus drivers themselves need to take some kind of in-house training such as 'how to deal with the community.'"
- ▶▶ "Maybe within the bus company themselves they need to make some changes, reduce the overtime. Make the drivers happier."
- ▶▶ "Put a security guard, a police officer on the bus."
- ▶▶ "I think the areas where people cross the street need to be more visible, and maybe more publicity about stopping at them. There are no signs that work for the pedestrians."
- ▶▶ "One suggestion I have is about the highway....you can't see the white lines....it should be mandatory that you can always see them, with those reflectors or something else."
- ▶▶ "If there is an accident on the highway, put a marquee about a mile before telling people to keep left or right...."
- ▶▶ "People in this community need bright lights."
- ▶▶ "Cameras? Video cameras."
- ▶▶ "Speed bumps. They won't drive down our streets."

5. Providence Housing Authority

Dexter Manor

February 21, 2001

Facilitating: Pamela Zappardino

TRANSCRIPTIONIST'S NOTE: Due to the substandard sound quality of the tape-recording of this focus group many responses could not be recorded accurately. Even at highest volume, there appears to be considerable feedback or white noise, and the speakers' voices at times are inaudible. Therefore, the audible highlights of this focus group only will be reported.

Constituent / Participant Group: Disabled

Pam: How do you all get around the city when you need to go out?

- Get a ride with someone
- Bus
- RIDE
- It isn't that easy to walk everywhere.

Pam: Is there anyone else who gets around some way other than the RIDE van or the buses?

- I was told when I moved here from Portland that there would be county transportation to the doctors, to grocery stores, but there isn't. A van sits outside in our parking lot, You ask for help and they look at you like, "how dare you?" I'm very disappointed with the Housing Authority and the State of Rhode Island. I have even had to pay people to bring my groceries up from the car.

Pam: If you don't take the bus anymore, how do you get around?

- I seen a lot of handicapped that don't have cars.
- I got my passes. I can't call nobody.
- Sometimes you talk to them real nice (bus drivers) and they give you attitude. That's why sometimes you get in trouble. That's why sometimes I walk. I miss a lot of appointments; it's a hassle.

Pam: Do the buses come close enough to where you live, and do they go where you need to go?

- Yes.
- Some of them do come; they leave you too far away.
- Some of them they leave you here, snow and rain, don't matter.

Pam: You said you didn't have too many problems with the RIDE van. What is your experience with RIDE?

- ✓ I go to Stop & Shop on Atwells Avenue, and I take a bus. I told her about the buses and she loves it.

6. International Institute

February 21, 2001

Facilitating: Abu Bakr

Participant / Constituent Group: Family / Immigrant

Abu: Think over the past year...can you talk about, name, all the different ways that you traveled somewhere—ten feet, ten thousand miles. Name all the different ways you got around the city of Providence or the state of Rhode Island.

- Bus [multiple responses]
- I have to take the bus to get to work. During the week, the buses come on time and they are usually pretty good. But they don't come earlier or at all on weekends and holidays? [Abu explained that he doesn't work for RIPTA; that his purpose with them today is to hear your experience about getting around. He explained that he can't tell them what the buses do, but that there was more information on the sheets that Shelley provided, and that Shelley can also help them with questions.]
- I have problems like that; I have to work at Filene's in Warwick, and the bus schedule affects how much I can work. I have to take a bus from school to work. But on Saturdays the bus stops at 6. I couldn't continue my job because I didn't have the public transportation to my job on weekends. They won't employ me full-time.

Abu paused the dialogue to confirm whether everyone present takes the bus, which they do.

Abu: It sounds like most everyone rides the bus, so we're going to spend most of our time, I think, talking about the bus, then we'll also talk about other ways. In addition to taking the bus, who else also drives?...OK, it seems as if a lot of you drive as well.

- Well, I don't have a car, but I get lifts from other people.

Abu: OK. I want to go back to you, you said you had some problems or concerns about the bus?

- I have two problems about the bus. You stay on the road for so long, and the bus don't ever come on time. If you miss one, you're waiting for about an hour. The second thing is, when you're on the bus, all kinds of people get on the bus, like drunkards and I don't know...smokers, drunkards, sitting right near you, he be drinking right there near you or blowing smoke in your face. It's very uncomfortable.

Abu: All right. It's uncomfortable; do you feel safe? Do you feel like you're in danger with some of the people on the bus?

- Yes. Yes.

Abu: What do you think the bus driver or anyone should do about that?

- I think the bus driver should stop people from smoking and drinking before they enter the bus. If you have to smoke, you smoke outside before you enter the bus. When you're in the bus, you stop smoking.

Abu: OK. Does anyone else have a concern about the bus schedules? You mentioned before that your experience has been the bus comes on time, and you get to work on time, and it works pretty well. Does anyone else have a problem with taking the bus and it being reliable about getting you where you need to go on time?

- Yes. I just want to ask a question. Even though I've not found a job yet, if I found a job, I don't have a car, I just come to America, I'm scheduled to work third shift.

Abu: Eleven to seven?

- Yeah. I don't have a car.

Abu: That's a good question. Where would you have to go to work?

- I live on Rollins Street, and I'm to go to work East Warwick. How do I get there?

Abu: It sounds like that might be a problem. Any other folks? You raised your hand again?

- I think, for most of us that are just getting in the country, the alarming issue about this whole situation, especially concerning jobs, is of transport. Most of the jobs you apply for, they ask you if you can make your way there. And if you say you don't have a car, you don't have any means, you're not going to get a job. And for that matter, the public transport that is expected to assist is not reaching to most of the areas. So some of the people saying buses can take them to their sites are all the main routes that the buses go. But most of the other jobs are outside of these buses' routes. So it becomes very difficult for one to get a job because you don't have your own car, and public transport doesn't go there. So that is the greatest problem we have. If there is no transportation for a job, we are not going to work. So most of us that are now today, not job in, are without public transportation. So we believe this public transportation should be that of which should help people to earn something, to where you find a job. But I think it is somehow restricted, like if you go downtown Providence, you see the bus goes just around that circle, comes right back, and goes up and turns around. Now what about you got a job on these routes? I don't got a job, I don't got a car, I don't got money. I think the key problem is, these buses are not sufficiently going to the routes that people that are in need, looking for a job, the buses are not taking these routes. Every minute they ask you, "you want a job? Do you have transportation?" And when you say no, you don't have a job. So the bus is really not doing those things that we think would help us. I don't want to just ride the bus around town, if I'm not working. I don't want to just ride the bus downtown if I don't have money. Now I want money, and so if the public transport is there, it would help me get a job. So I think what governor or state need to do is improve on expanding the bus system to those routes that are not abandoned, where I think a majority get their jobs, look at these routes and earmark these centers so people can easily get to jobs. And this is the situation of jobs. I think every person enlisted know when it ends and when it begins, and kind of draw a...organize a kind of mechanism that would engulf the public workers.

Abu: So it sounds like it's what you'd call a vicious circle. You just come into the country, perhaps. You may not have the money to be able to afford and buy an automobile, because you don't have a job, but you can't get a job because the public transportation may not get you to the job on time, and like you said, if you work at a different shift—you work third shift, which may be the only job some people can get—the transportation doesn't get you there at that particular time. So either you can't get there or you can't get home.

- Yeah.

Abu: Now I saw you had your hand up. Are you agreeing with that?

- I just want to say, I'm seeing the same thing, the same problem, we're all facing it too.

Abu: All right. Now I want to ask this other question too. Anyone experience the same kind of concerns that Milton just expressed?

- Yes [multiple respondents].

Abu: Anyone else who hasn't had a chance to talk yet wants to chime in on what Milton had to say? Yes, Liliana?

- My English, it's very bad. **[Abu: Sounds pretty good to me.]** I don't know if you be able to understand what I mean. **[Abu: If I don't, I'll ask.]** I use here English class, and I come from Bristol here. I'm from nine to twelve, three hours, and I use buses, and I need for transportation three hours and forty-five minutes from Bristol to here and here to Bristol. **[Abu: so that's the total? It takes three hours and forty-five minutes?]** Yes. I lost much more time on buses from school. I have long way from here to Kennedy Plaza, some buses stop here, and other buses don't. Sometimes they don't stop. I have a big school bag; they think I'm a student and don't stop. Then I lose my bus from Kennedy Plaza to Bristol. Or some bus driver drive not to Letter "L" ---he stop before Johnson and Wales University, then I come late to next bus. I feel unsafe, uncomfortable in bus sometimes. They stop too fast, it's not bus stop. Last week I was crying in buses. I come from Europe, in Europe, it's different, public transportation. I feel safe in bus, not how like here the drunken people, smoking and screaming.

Abu: Now you mentioned that sometimes when you have a bookbag that the bus might not stop for you because they think you're a student?

- Yeah.

Abu: This happened to you before?

- Yes, yes. The other bus driver, some bus drivers are very selfish.

Abu: So for you, it takes you almost four hours to travel back and forth because you have to ride — from Bristol you have to go into Kennedy Plaza, and then take another bus here, but the time sounds like a lot, a great deal.

- Or sometimes bus don't have Elmwood Avenue, and I ask, "where you driving? Are you driving to Elmwood Avenue?" He tell me, "Yes, I drive to Elmwood Avenue," and then he drive some other route [at this point, a clamoring of agreement, "yes," and other assent from the rest of the group.] I must walk for twenty minutes, I don't know where I am, I feel lost here. I don't know to find International Institute. It's not my number 20, he's 21, but he have nothing. They give not good information. My English, it's bad, but they try not to tell me some information sometimes.

Abu: OK. Hold on to what you were just going to say. In an instance like that, you obviously need to get information from a bus driver. And so they may or may understand you, they may or may not give you the right information, you get dropped off, you've got to figure out where you are and where you might need to go. Let's say that you were somewhere, and you weren't really sure how to get to where you had to go, and you knew you had to take the bus, how would you find out how to go from your home to some other place that you" never been before? How would you find out how to get there?

- Ask a question. **[Abu: Of whom?]**
- I have schedule. **[Abu: Whom would you ask?]**
- The bus driver. [Multiple respondents.]
- I think one of the problems is surrounding a particular issue. Not many of us have the schedules of the buses, and if you miss one bus, sometimes you are not going to get another bus for another hour. For me, I got to feel that there was only one bus for one route. Because if one passes by, you find it hard to get the other one, and there are specific numbers for specific routes. Now, if you miss one, sometimes you gonna miss the rest, because you don't know whether one or two have gone already, and you have come back, now you have a schedule and you need to get somewhere in an hour's time or thirty minutes, and you are standing there for that one hour, and you are late one hour! Many times we notice that most buses are "Out of Service," you know, at our most basic times. You see a bus coming, it's your number, you are waiting, and you see [the sign on it says] "Out of Service." It comes and passes by. You are wasted, you are standing, you are hopeless, and it's not like you can just stop somebody and say, "carry me."

Abu: And the other part, too, from what you're saying, is that sometimes the bus might be late, but if you don't know the schedule, it might not be late, it's just that it doesn't come very frequently.

Yes, ma'am?

- I'm sorry, I'm not from here, but I just have a question. Doesn't the bus have information that you can call, if you want to be at a place at 2 o'clock, you call the bus information—I'm from Washington D.C.—and tell them this address, and they're going to ask you what time you need to be there. And once you tell them the time, they able to tell you the different times the bus comes that you supposed to take to get to this place. And in reference to what that guy was saying over there, I thought if the drunkards got on the bus, and start acting and misbehaving and smoking, or playing music loud, I thought they supposed to say, "out of the bus." I thought that was the law. Why don't they do that in Providence? I used to live in Providence fourteen years ago, why don't they do that anymore?

Abu: Has anyone ever seen that happen?

- No.
- Well, once.
- I thought there was supposed to be a sign on the buses. If a person is drunk, I think they have a right to ask a person to get out. If a person is misbehaving, I think the bus driver has a right to ask the person to get out.

Abu: Has anyone ever been in a situation where they asked a bus driver to do something?

- Yeah. I was on my way from downtown, and a Spanish guy got on the bus, and he was so drunk. And this guy was right up in my face, wanting to put his hands around me, and I was so embarrassed, so I got up and went up to the bus driver and said, "I don't want to talk with this guy, please ask him to leave or ask him to get out of the bus." And the bus driver stopped the bus and tried to talk to him, but then he started insulting the bus driver, but the guy had to continue, so he continued his way until he could, between Elmwood and Broad Street there. The guy said, "I will drop you at the bus station," and this guy said no, and he went over the bus driver and was demanding the guy to stop right there. They almost got into a fight. The driver had to open the door for him to get out right there.

Abu: OK. Yes, sir?

- Yeah, I just wanted to clarify a point that [person's name?] talked about, not being able to access work. This is not unique to this group. This issue is constantly receiving new arrivals. So there are always a new group of arrivals, who don't know what to do, don't know how to access the bus, so it's not a question of whether you solve this problem now and it's over. It will happen continuously because there will not be a shortage of needs of people to go to where the jobs are.

Abu: OK. Thomas, you had another thing?

- When they come at the bus stop, and maybe you are somewhere trying to run, but not at that point, they don't stop for you.
- They never stop.
- Never. You run, and they don't stop.

Abu: Let me ask you this: why, if, and let's assume that they saw you, why would they leave?

- At times you are across the road, and there is traffic, you can't just run into the cars, you have to wait and you are seeing your bus coming and you have to be on that bus, you begin to wave, to have the bus driver wait a little while, he doesn't listen. He goes.

Abu: Why do you think they don't wait?

- I don't know.

- We are thinking that maybe they expect you to be at appointments, but what if you also, with the same intention of being at appointments, is blocked by traffic? Shouldn't you also have that consideration?

Abu: So you don't think they stop being maybe they're not considerate?

- Yeah, that's how I believe.
- Maybe they don't see you, but maybe they're not considerate.
- Excuse me, is there any stipulated time that all travel, or is it forever admitted? Or as soon as it comes?

Abu: I'm not sure of that, but it sounds like, at least as far as you're concerned, courtesy would dictate that if you see someone coming, that you would wait a little bit for them to be able to get across the street, get through traffic, and be able to catch your bus.

- And besides, they should have a minute or two to wait, because you can't just be flying as soon as you stop and just go like that. Sometimes there are people across there who are waiting, or because of the traffic, come a minute later, maybe they are old ladies coming a little distance. I have seen them, she's not able to walk, she walks like this, and she's heading towards the very bus there. On the same, she would be left behind, and all these things, we have to be given time.

Abu: Now let me ask this other question: I want to ask you about the attitude and the courtesy of the bus drivers themselves. Can you describe to me instances where you thought the bus drivers were very helpful, where they were very courteous, where they made your ride comfortable and safe, and on the other hand I'd like to hear about instances where the drivers were not very helpful, or where you felt they had been rude or discourteous. Anybody have any instances they want to share?

- Most of them have been very helpful. The first time I ride the bus, I used five dollars. I had the five dollars, and it took my five dollars. It's better to get change. I asked him if he could get change, and he said I can't get change back.

At this point, the group was interrupted by several classes assembling during their break time. The group was forced to break up and reconvene to another room.

Abu: OK, when we broke up, how many people did we lose? Not too many of them? OK, when we broke up, we were starting to talk about the helpfulness and the courteousness of the bus drivers, and Thomas, you were talking. I want to get you to repeat that, because it became hard to hear.

- I think the bus drivers, they have been helpful, most of them very helpful. But some people, when they come here, they don't understand English, so they just have a hard time. When I first took the bus I had five dollars. Usually back home they change your money, and when I saw people putting the money in [the money acceptors on the bus] I just wanted to put my five dollars away. [Unintelligible. Person seems to be eating while speaking.] I think I deserve some courtesy, to get some money back to help me get back home. But he didn't give me anything and he didn't do anything about it.

Abu: He said, "Too bad"? [Respondent: "yes."] Now you mentioned that sometimes you feel the bus drivers are helpful. Can you describe a situation when they've been helpful to you?

- When I'm going to my destination, and I begin to get near my destination, the driver tells me to get on the bus 11 or some other bus to get where I need to go. They are helpful then.

Abu: So there have been instances where, once you knew where you were going, they did provide you with the correct information? Has this happened to other people as well?

- Yeah, that happened to me on Broad Street. Broad and [unintelligible] Street. I was waiting for the bus, and then the bus came, and I didn't know which way, because I wanted to go downtown, and I got on the bus going on the same Broad Street, and I just got on the bus, and put my money in, and the bus took me all the way there. Everybody got out of the bus, and nobody else was in the bus, I was the only one there, and maybe he could turn around, and all of a sudden he went back and said, "where are you going?" I said, "I'm going downtown," and he said, "No, I'm sorry, I will be staying here for about ten or fifteen minutes. The other bus is there, you have to get on that one, and go downtown." I said, "OK," but I thought I lost my money, he said, "oh no, just [unintelligible]. He told the other driver, 'she missed her way. She already put her money in but she was going downtown.'" The other one just let me walk in the bus.

Abu: That was exactly the opposite of what happened with you. You lost a whole five dollars. Any other instances people have of bus drivers being helpful and courteous, or maybe not being so helpful?

- Excuse me, I don't have anything to say, but actually I only seven days old in Providence, so I haven't any experience with the bus because I haven't ridden the bus. But I've been asking a couple of questions, and maybe I could ask the same question and get some answer. I was wondering, I haven't had the opportunity to go many places where the buses run, but I don't really know where they run, because places often have had to go, residential areas where I don't see the buses. So I was asking why doesn't the bus come this way, and people are saying only the buses supply only the main routes. And I was wondering, because I end up in Providence during the summer, or I enter America during the winter, which is very cool, and so I wonder how these people manage if the bus has to put them on the main route and they have to find a way you know, inside, and these are people who don't have their own vehicles. So how they manage, because you're talking about living a certain distance to get to the route the bus supplies, and the bus drops you off but you have to go back. So what is done for people like this who fall in such categories?

Abu: That's a good question to ask, and it's in fact something that I wanted to begin to ask everyone else, because sometimes, if you take the bus here, you probably get off at the corner and walk, what, about a half a block, if you're coming to the building? But sometimes, if you travel by bus, it doesn't drop you off exactly at your destination, and you have to walk a distance to be able to get there. Is that true for a lot of people?

- Yeah.
- I've seen some streets that these bus signs are, but the buses does not stop. If you check the west lane, then you get to another street. That street has this bus signs.
- Over on Imperial Ave. they have the signs.
- I keep wondering because I take the bus, takes the Elmwood that stops by DHS there, that one coming in is supposed to have another stop, but that bus does not go there, it just goes the main routes. So this time I'm coming in, I see the bus signs, and you begin to wonder why these buses don't stop. Why should they abandon these routes?

Abu: OK. So what you're saying is that you see a bus stop sign, designated for a certain bus, but the bus never goes there. [Respondent: No, it never goes.] The bus route was abandoned, but they never took down the sign, or they come very infrequently. [Respondent: Yes.] OK. For people who have to walk some distance, before you are able to get to your destination, or who have to walk some distance to get to the bus, what is it like for you to walk there? In the summertime, in the wintertime, what's the condition of the sidewalks? Do you feel safe when you have to walk?

- In the winter, in the winter it's no good.
- You going to be slimed.

- You falling, oh, I fell down. It hurt so bad. I refuse to go out that day.

Abu: Is this walking from home to the bus stop?

- Yeah.

Abu: Whereabouts do you live?

- I live in [unintelligible] Street, and it's about two or three blocks, if we get it on Broad Street. So I have to walk on Broad Street to get the bus that day and I fell on my arm. It got scraping and all, and all my clothes were wet, so I couldn't go anywhere. I turned around and came back home.

Abu: Yes. And this is after a snowstorm?

- Yes.

Abu: Now in those instances, the sidewalks are not cleared? Do you walk in the street?

- Yes [multiple respondents].
- Sometimes I don't see the times, because I live on the West Lane, and I have to get a bus for [unintelligible]. When I get up there, I have to work in down, get up on Broad Street, before I can get to my house. It's a distance. This is the very street I was talking about has been abandoned. The street that would have taken me towards my direction, I can't take Broad Street bus because it's far for me to walk to Broad Street and then get on the bus. So I have to use the other bus. If I get there and [unintelligible] more than half a mile or so, then walk a while on Broad Street. [Unintelligible] for instance if I get a job and have to work up until midnight, I think it's a risk.
- I think the problem is the weather, because even back home we had streets for buses. The problem here, it's so cold that if you don't have a car, and the bus drops you, you have to walk and people complain about the bus not taking them there. As for walking, we used to walk when the weather was all right.
- We wish a bus for every little corner that they can.

Abu: You're saying that sometimes, when you get off the bus, you may not be able to get onto the sidewalk itself because of the bus being piled up and so forth. Yes, ma'am?

- One problem that some of us, we ride the bus, the stops. You don't know the stop, so he gives them a hard time, we going to Warwick [unintelligible].

Abu: Right, some times you're not aware of where you are and you go way past your bus stop. It would be helpful if they announced the bus stops?

- Yeah.
- There was only once a bus driver did that, the only time.

Abu: How do you do that?

- [Unintelligible response.]

Abu: Here in Providence?

- Any stop he gets at, and when he stops at downtown [unintelligible because someone else is speaking right next to the microphone].
- We have always been fortunate for our driver.

Abu: Who else takes the 99? You do? You take it together?

- Sometimes, but not always to the same place.

Abu: So you're on the same bus. Now when you do this, does this happen all the time?

- Not all the time.

Abu: It's one particular driver who does this?

- It's the one guy always doing it.

Abu: I was just saying, we were at a group and somebody else mentioned that, it would be helpful to me too, cause you're on the bus and sometimes it's crowded. And I'm tall, so I can't always see where we're going, so I might not know where I am.

- Where we came from, there are buses, and they announce every bus stop.
- Every stop.
- From one stop to another, when they approaching another, they announce, "we are stopping at this point." It's a way of the city system, because sometimes you forget, especially on the bus. There are a good amount of people.
- Announcing them would be very helpful. We are used to that system, and many times when I take the bus I expect them to be announcing, and there's no information, and I cannot look at all these streets, and there's no announcements.
- It's not only for us refugees coming here, but even for other people, strangers, visitors.
- One time I got in a bus, we were on the same route of Broad Street, 12, and 21 was there, but I missed the 21 because I was crossing and it would not stop. So I took 12, because it coming the same time, to International Institute. And I look up on Walgreens way, and I saw people getting on, so I thought oh, maybe he turn around, and he carry me all the way to the end of Warwick. I was the only one left on that bus at the end! [Group laughter.] I said, "I'm going to the Institute," and he said, "oh , do you know how many miles away it is??" I said, "please, can you drop me there?" and he said, "OK, I will take you there, but first I got to wait here for five minutes to [unintelligible]" He turned around to me and said, "ma'am, when you got on this bus you were taking the scenic route!" I said "but I'm taking the same Broad Street route!" But I didn't know. And I start forgetting, but I didn't know.

Abu: Has anyone ever taken the bus and they ask the bus driver, "can you let me know when I arrive at my destination?" Has anyone ever done that here?

- I did that once. They showed me where it was.
- This one showed me. He wasn't sure exactly where I was going, but he showed me as close as he knew.
- Even when I came back, he said, "you know what? Kept on straight and [unintelligible] is the Institute."
- Once they stopped at Compare Supermarket and said, "this is the only bus stop, but your street is the next street. You go, you get to the end, and go to the next street."

Abu: It sounds like a lot of you have had instances where the bus drivers have been really helpful, when they can be. And you had an instance on 99 when it sounds like they went above and beyond, where they announced every single bus stop. Some of you mentioned getting to your bus stop and having to wait a long time. ["Yes" and other sounds of assent among group members.] When that happens to you, sometimes bus stops have shelters. Some do and some don't.

- One night I was in the cold, it was raining, sat there for almost an hour.
- Sometimes I wonder whether the bus shelters only belong to one bus. I'm serious. There's the one bus, bus 11, and if you miss that bus you have to wait one or two hours before another one comes [unintelligible].
- I wait too. I don't know whether there is one or two buses. It's rude. It's difficult to find a bus sometimes.

Abu: Most of you take the bus. Some of you know other people who have cars, and you're able to get a car sometimes. I think you there drive most of the time.

- I don't have a car.
- I drive, I drive.

Abu: What is it like for you to go shopping? [Groans, sounds of 'ugh,' etc.] **OK, there are some folks who haven't had a chance to speak yet. If you haven't had a chance to talk yet, you want to talk about that?**

- I live in Johnston. Everything is OK. The bus is clean, sometimes they come late. The best thing we need at Chalkstone is more buses. Transportation is low.

Abu: You need more buses, and you need them to come more frequently.

- Yes, that's what I mean.

Abu: Do you have to go shopping? Do you have to take the bus to go shopping?

- No [unintelligible].

Abu: All right. Bus shoppers, I hit a sore nerve, so tell me what that's about.

- I want to start please. For us, we are introduced to stores that are a bit cheaper for us, and we like to really go to these places to buy, because we don't have money and we have to use food stamps and we have to look for these centers. So it happened that most of the time I had to go to get food with my family. It's a difficult thing. We go, and we have to buy enough food so that at least we can spend a week with that food, we don't have to be going out every minute. Now, when we buy that one week food, to get it from the food store on the road is a problem. When you stand on the road to get the bus, many a times when we are two, to put in all these things is not taxing the bus. And where I stop when I put down my food is a problem, because one street bad, good, so it is so difficult to get food.

Abu: When do you normally go?

- I mostly like to go on weekends.

Abu: Is the bus service the same on the weekends?

- On the weekends it's dangerous, very much. Because all the stop are set an hour, and sometimes in the day, you don't have time. Maybe in the evening, sometimes you have time to go and find the food you want, maybe that will kill time. And when you go to get on the bus, you have problem, there is no bus. So it's a difficult time.

Abu: Other folks, experience shopping?

- Not exactly shopping, but talking about weekends at Rhode Island College. The bus don't run, we have to leave the classes for the week because we don't have transportation, and you have to go on Smith Street and sometimes you have to leave classes for that reason, so that is one of my problems.

Abu: And we mentioned earlier that sometimes people have been in situations where they have to leave work early or can't keep a job, because the buses don't run at a certain hour, and on weekends it sounds like the bus service is even less frequent. Other folks who have to do shopping and want to say anything about it?

- I have a sister, she doesn't really go out much. Even when she want to buy something, she [unintelligible] She like to go to the East Side of Providence, she like to go to Shaw's, Stop & Shop or Ames, but it's two different buses. So [unintelligible] come back from Shaw's and go to school, right? Instead of getting a bus, coming to downtown Providence, getting another bus, go to Ames. It's too hard, shopping with the buses, because you can't get everything at one store.
- Sometimes you get something today, the price is right. Next day you have to go somewhere else to save a lot.

- The buses are one of the best ways of getting around. [Unintelligible because several people started talking at once.]

Abu: Let me ask this quickly. We're going to finish up in a couple of minutes. But I wanted to just throw this question out. Is there anything we should have talked about as it relates to transportation that maybe we didn't get to or talk about today, and are there any suggestions for improvements that you would make, any recommendations that you would make that you think would be important for the people in this state to hear, that maybe haven't been stated yet? Any issues we haven't talked about yet that we should have, or any suggestions or recommendations that you would make that haven't been made today so far?

- I think the only recommendation I would have is at least the state should have security on the buses. At least two security on each bus, because some guys who get on the bus, like a group, they misbehave. And the driver would not be in the position to control this, these guys who are misbehaving. I think the security should be on the bus, responsible for that. The driver should only be concentrating on the steering and where to stop.
- Another one is that the buses should at least have a minute or two to wait at each point to enable those that are around to get on the bus, but when you are seeing the bus and you are trying to stop it and having a hard time, it goes and you are left behind. At least a minute at each point so that anybody around that area can get on the bus.
- Another thing, increase the number of buses so they come more often.
- I think they should also think about using many buses to bring people from one point to residential areas, where they can get the bus. Like she said, but it probably wasn't her fault, the snowflakes on the ground and all like that. Some neighborhoods you probably won't want to trust the security in the neighborhood, if you work late hours, come home like eleven, two, three, all like that. So I think they probably should have these big buses working along with little buses that can commit people into residential areas.
- It seems the bus runs until around 11, so maybe until 12 o'clock?

Abu: Any other suggestions or recommendations that you'd like to make that haven't been made so far?

- Information. They should have information materials in all the buses, because people who are coming in and don't know where they have to stop, it is not announced to them. But they should have some leaflet or whatever, a list, they can pick up from the bus, that give them the places it stop, or somebody should announce each stop, so that when you are even a stranger, when it is announced ahead, you know the bus is going to stop at the Institute, and you can just walk down to the front of the bus).
- I want us to balance the equation. See, my brother down there, Milton, when we were down there earlier, he said once upon a time he was going to the bus stop, and he was across the road, he tried to wait for the bus to stop. I want to caution us to be on time, at the bus stop. Be on time, let's be fair. If you look at the time, and you are on the other side of the road, and the bus is coming don't the road—I mean, you didn't time yourself in time to be there?
- But at the same time the bus should wait at least two or three minutes
- But the bus don't have time to wait.
- OK, yes, I agree. The bus waiting again, that means it doesn't have time. A bus is delayed or late.
- [Chatter among the group.]
- Listen, what I'm saying is, we should be there on time.
- If you were not there on time, and you saw the bus and the driver saw you, you try to stop him but he doesn't stop, is that fair?
- We don't need just hand, the bus driver needs [unintelligible] bus stop. Maybe it's dangerous for other driver to stop suddenly for someone who is late.

- Excuse me, you are contradicting everything. Some buses come before the time, and some buses don't come on time at all. What if the bus comes earlier before you arrive?
- You don't know.
- The time is listed on the schedule.
- The problem we're having with this issue is sometimes one bus passes, so people think there's only one bus. Ordinarily, the bus wouldn't have to wait if there were enough buses. I would suggest they increase the number of buses, because perhaps they bought these buses a long time ago, when Rhode Island had a smaller busing population, and now the population has grown. They should allow the buses to grow in quantity to match the busing population.

Abu: OK. Let's let that be the last official comment. We will obviously take your information, along with the other information we're getting, present it to the state leaders, and hopefully in the near future and long term, some of the suggestions that you made, you'll see them implemented in a generally improved system of transportation. I appreciate very much your involvement this morning, and your sharing of your experiences. We'll see you soon.

International Institute

Focus Group Highlights and Recommendations

Modes of Transportation

- ✓ The majority noted public transportation, cars, *walking, and alternative modes (rides from friends and relatives)* as the primary means of transportation.

Accessibility, Reliability, Comfort and Safety

- ✓ During the *week buses come on time*
- ✓ During the *weekend they don't come* on time or not at all.
- ✓ The bus *schedule affects participants' work schedules and employability*
- ✓ *Smokers and drunkards* affect the safety and comfort of the passengers.
- ✓ The *travel time is excessive (over three hours) from other parts of the state into Providence*
- ✓ Participants feel that *more buses are needed* on certain routes
- ✓ *Shopping on the weekends is very difficult and takes a long time*

Customer Service (RIPTA bus drivers)

- ✓ Some bus drivers are "selfish"
- ✓ *Bus drivers may not stop for you* if they think you are a student.
- ✓ Drivers give *incorrect or withhold information*
- ✓ Drivers *should enforce no smoking policies*
- ✓ Drivers *drive too fast past bus stops* and don't see people who want to get on

Pedestrian Safety

- ✓ The walking is very difficult in the winter time

Participant Recommendations:

- ▶▶ "The state should have security on the buses....the driver should only be concentrating on the steering and where to stop."
- ▶▶ "Buses should have at least a minute or two to wait at each point to enable those that are around to get on the bus."
- ▶▶ "Increase the number of buses so they come more often."
- ▶▶ "They should also think about using mini buses to bring people from one point to residential area."
- ▶▶ "They should have information materials in all the buses."
- ▶▶ "Somebody should announce each stop..."

7. YouthBuild

February 23, 2001

Facilitating: Abu Bakr

Participant / Constituent Group: Youth

Abu: This is going to be pretty informal, so if you feel like you need to grab another donut or another cup of juice, feel free to do that. When you offer up, you don't have to raise your hand; let's try not to talk over each other. I know you all respect each other a great deal in the program--- I've been up to YouthBuild a few times, and had an opportunity to speak with students in the program before. So, if it gets difficult for Pam to record because so many people are talking, I might ask you to chill just for a minute, and have somebody else finish, but we make sure that if you have something to say, you get a chance to express your opinion. So—yes?

➤ I have a problem.

Abu: You have a problem?

➤ Yeah. When I take the bus 71 back to Cumberland from Pawtucket, it really sucks because I miss the Lincoln Mall one, so I have to walk there, but on the bus schedule it says they're supposed to come later, but all the bus drivers are a bunch of pricks, so they tell me like, "oh, you missed the one at 2:30," so I just take the 71 Saylesville, and it drops me off on Broad Street in Cumberland, near Cumberland Farms, near a big Catholic Church, first Church in Rhode Island. So I'd like to have the mall one come back, 'cause they reopened the George Washington bridge.

Abu: You said that sometimes you might miss the 2:30 bus?

➤ 2:45.

Abu: 2:45 bus? And there isn't another bus that comes after that?

➤ There's a 5:45, so I'd have to wait three hours.

Abu: So the next bus that comes afterwards is three hours later? [Respondent: "yes."] **Do any of you here drive?** [Some group members may have gestured that they do.] **When you drive, that's your means of transportation wherever you go?** [There may again have been a gestured response.] **Do you ever take the bus?**

- No.
- That's how I got around before.
- I hope I never have to take it again.

Abu: That's how you got around before you drove, is take the bus? [Respondent may have gestured affirmatively.] **All right, so let's talk about—**

➤ They get mad potholes on the trolleys to CCRI. The guy hits all the bumps, man. There's this one old lady, man, she's got a crew cut, she swears at all the people, she's bad.

Abu: Who, the bus driver?

➤ Yeah.

Abu: All right, let's talk about taking the bus first, and then we'll talk about experience driving, 'cause everybody takes a bus at some point in time, everybody's taken the bus here, except for the folks who drive. **Other than coming here, where else do you wind up taking the bus?**

➤ I only go with my brother. He has an automobile.

- Downtown.

Abu: Where do you go downtown?

- The mall.
- The bus drivers just pass you by sometimes. I was at the bus stop, and they come so late, sometimes they just go by.

Abu: Let me ask you this question, and you may or may not know this. Anyone else have a bus driver pass them by?

- Yes
- At the bus stop
- Oh, yeah, and the passes cost \$35.

Abu: All right, we're going to get to that in a minute. Why do you think he passed you up?

- I don't know. Maybe he had too many people on the bus.
- That happens a lot.
- I don't take the bus.

Abu: You don't take the bus at all? How do you get around?

- I drive.

Abu: Have you ever taken the bus before?

- Yeah, back in high school.

Abu: Ah, you can recall back in those days! Other folks, tell me about your experiences taking the bus.

- 57 [very hard to hear---some kind of noise near microphone] And when the bus comes, it set there for ten or fifteen minutes.
- That's why you go over and take the 17 or 19.

Abu: All right, where do you catch it?

- Behind the Avis.
- Even if it says downtown on the bus stop, it's really aggravating waiting for the bus and it doesn't pull up. It's late almost all the time.
- [Unintelligible.]
- They're working on it.
- That's downtown, though.
- They should be more enclosed.

Abu: Now you're taking buses from shelters where they have seats? I thought none of them had seats.

- Some of them do, the glass ones, but the wind comes in, and it's all cold and shit.
- The new ones do.

Abu: The new ones do? When you take the bus, do you take it at a stop that has one like that?

- Yes.

Abu: Where's that?

- Woonsocket.

Abu: Woonsocket. Not in the city of Providence.

- There are many in the city of Providence. I've seen them.
- There's like four in downtown.
- There's one near my house. Douglas Ave. There's one near Admiral Street, too. That bus comes like every ten minutes. [Unintelligible.]

Abu: OK, part of what I heard folks say is that the buses you want to take, they either don't come at the time they're supposed to come, or if you miss one, you can't catch another one for a really long time. Is that pretty consistent with everyone else? Is that what you feel happens most of the time? Let me ask you this: the buses that you take, regardless of where you take them, do you actually know what the schedule is?

- On the route I take. My bus comes like, 11:50, 12:50, 1:50. That's the wrong time span.

Abu: All right, the rest of you, with the buses that you all take, do you know what the schedule is? [Respondents: "yes."] The bus that you take, how often is the bus supposed to come?

- Almost every hour.
- Every hour.
- I think they're doing a good job, because it depends where you're at. If a lot of people are not taking the bus on your route, they're not going to have them every ten minutes, like on Broad Street. 'Cause I lived off Broad Street and it used to come every five minutes, but that's because a lot of people take that bus. But they're not going to waste their time to go everywhere if people are not going there. They've been in service for how many years, so they already know.

Abu: Her opinion was that RIPTA probably has a pretty good idea of the number of people who are taking the buses, so they probably schedule it depending on—

- They should have more consideration, though.

Abu: You mean the bus drivers themselves?

- Well, I know Douglas is a long route. They should have two buses. They got to go all the way up Douglas, all the way around, down into North Providence, then wait at Shaw's for twenty minutes, come all the way down Admiral Street, then come all the way back downtown. It's really long to wait.

Abu: All right. Where else do you all take the bus? Where else do you have to go?

- Sometimes I go to Elmwood Ave. [Unintelligible. Rhythmic scratching/rubbing noise right near microphone.]

Abu: Uh-huh. Now in terms of the bus just being reliable, if you know you have to go somewhere, and you know what time the bus is coming, can you generally depend on it?

- Not all the time. 11:50 bus, I go out there, and 11:45 the bus already came. Or sometimes it doesn't come until 12 o'clock.

Abu: So sometimes it might come early?

- Yeah, and sometimes it come late.

Abu: I'd like to hear what other people think about bus travel.

- I sit out at the bus stop waiting for the bus and sometimes there's nothing.
- That's what happens to me.
- I'll sit at the bus stop; I'll be early, five, ten minutes early, waiting for the bus forty-five minutes. I start walking', sometimes the bus pass me by on my way. I just look at it. I get to where I need to go.
- And it ain't cheap. Dollar twenty-five. It ain't cheap, know what I'm saying? A dollar twenty-five.

Abu: Given the fact that it's going to cost you at least a dollar and a quarter regardless of where you go—that's the cheapest price now?

- Yeah.
- A dollar fifty if you want a transfer so you don't have to pay to get on the next bus.

Abu: All right. Let me ask you this: do you think that the price is right? Is it too expensive? Is it just right?

- It's too expensive.
- If we're putting more money into it, we should get more buses for the routes. I remember when it was only like sixty cents to get on the bus.

Abu: When was that? You were like three years old?

- Yeah [laughing].
- They should have kept it at a dollar.
- Yeah, a dollar's fair.

Abu: Do you ever not take the bus because you think it costs you too much money to get there?

- Costs too much money for a bus pass. Thirty-five dollars.
- Unless you was like me at Central. When I went to Central, I paid a dollar-fifty to get there, a dollar-fifty to get there...I spent four or five dollars a day and all cause they say I didn't live three miles? I lived in North Providence! I'm sure North Providence/South side is more than three miles.

Abu: You mentioned bus passes. Do you have one? [Some chatter in response; hard to make out what they're saying.] **Why'd you decide to buy the bus pass?**

- Cause those f*****g RIPTIKs are like eleven seventy-five for the same amount you'd pay for the bus. It was just a ticket instead of money. It stunk. There was no point in—the only way you could get some sort of profit was with a bus pass. I pay thirty-five bucks a month, when I used to pay five bucks a day for like twenty days, thirty. I'd end up paying to take all the buses I had to. That's like a hundred bucks.

Abu: So when you buy the bus pass like that, you save money.

- Yeah.

Abu: When you buy a regular RIPTIK, it's just the same as paying the bus, the same price.

- It sucks.
- It sure was good when it was eighty-five cents to take the bus.
- [Male speaker. Unintelligible]

Abu: How can you be eligible to buy a bus pass?

- You go anywhere; you can go to Shaw's, Stop & Shop, or Banquet Island.
- You just buy it.

Abu: OK, I want to understand how RIPTA does this, so you have to explain it to me. Now you said the bus pass costs you less than buying a triptych?

- Buying a RIPTIK or paying it. I can take the bus anywhere I want, anyday, anywhere in Rhode Island, anyday, for the bus pass. When you pay a dollar twenty-five, you have to find that bus to go. Like me, I could take the bus just to go around the corner if I wanted to be a jerk.

Abu: OK. But you, for example, you didn't buy one because you don't ride enough for it to be economical for you, right? It doesn't make any sense. Is that the same for most of you all? Why you haven't bought one?

- ‘Cause it’s only for a month.

Abu: You don’t need one? ‘Cause you don’t take the bus that often?

- Right, [says something too softly for microphone to pick up.]

Abu: All right, I’m not even going to ask you how you wound up doing that, unless you want to offer. How do you wind up riding free?

- [Unintelligible.]

Abu: All right, you got a pass for somebody, somehow, somewhere.

- Yeah. An Amtrak pass.

Abu: Which is not available to the general public? [Respondent: “No.”] OK. Talking about the bus drivers. First thing I want to ask you, because I know that you probably have some other stories, is can you tell me of times or instances where the bus drivers were helpful, gave you good information, were courteous or nice to you—can you tell me instances when that happened?

- Yeah. This one bus driver, he’d stop at every stop, and he’d say, “have a nice day” or whatever to people getting off the bus.
- I got some of them too. You know how they got the things on the bus, like the cords, say there’s a stop up the street and we come up to the place we’re going, and you pull the cord, to tell him to stop. Sometimes they go, “oh, this ain’t the stop, you got to go up to...”

Abu: All right, I want you to hold onto that for a second, because I want to hear about other times people felt like the bus drivers were helpful, informative, courteous. I want to get those stories out and then we’ll get to the stories where they dissed you or something like that.

- On some of the buses they say, “hi,” when you walk in or leave.
- Sometimes they’ll stop for you when you’re running for the bus.

Abu: You had that happen?

- A lot of times.
- I’ve ran for the bus and had the driver just ride away ‘cause he’s a dick.

Abu: All right, I want to hold on to those stories about the bus drivers dissing you.

- I know a lot of the bus drivers [unintelligible]...say, “hello,” “hi,” “thank you,” “have a nice day,” something like that.

Abu: All right. Any other instances or stories of bus drivers who were helpful or courteous? Made your day a little bit better than it was before? [No further responses.] All right. Now your stories about bus drivers who were exactly the opposite: not helpful, rude, discourteous, nasty. Tell me some of those stories.

- About the bus stop thing?

Abu: Yes, anything. All right, so you had already told that story. Anybody else? I think you were laughing about something?

- I took the bus from school, and the bus driver put it in neutral and hit the gas, like all the way down, and then put it in drive. I don’t know why he did that, but my neck was hurting. [Laughs.] Trying to peel out, I guess.

Abu: Were you standing up?

- No, I was sitting down. There was a couple people standing up.
- Yeah, they stop mad quick.

- When the seats are full, and people stand up? I don't think that's safe.
- Yeah, I think we should have seat belts, man. They make a short stop, you can slide all the way down the seat.

Abu: All right. Other instances where bus drivers were not treating you the way they should?

- Bus driver [unintelligible].

Abu: I want to hear from you about anything that you think is important to take back to these folks who are going to be dealing with transportation issues.

- I think we should have more bike racks in the front, 'cause the ones that come sometimes don't offer a bike rack. It would be helpful, 'cause when the bus drops me off, halfway up Broad Street, I have to walk all that way. If I could ride my bike back...

Abu: Do any of you ride a bike, and would find that helpful?

- [Unintelligible]...extra to put a bike rack on? [Unintelligible, followed by several people laughing.]
- It's a lot better to ride my bike. I stop where I want to stop, I don't have to ride way up the street, blocks away from my house. There's a bus stop right at my corner, but they tell me that's not the bus stop when it is.

Abu: He was saying that he would use his bike, because sometimes when he gets off the bus, he has a long way to walk, so having the bike would be helpful, getting from the bus stop to wherever it is he might be going, because the bus stop might not be taking him close enough.

- He might as well just ride his bike home.
- It would take an hour.
- Yeah, riding from Providence to Cumberland.
- You got to wait like an hour, anyway.

Abu: Do any of you ever take the bus—I know some of you said you lived in Woonsocket—any of you, for example, ever take the bus down in the summer down to the beaches, South County, Narragansett? You ever go?

- I got the beaches, but I don't take the bus there.

Abu: How do you go?

- I get a ride, cause I ain't got time to take no bus, standing out there.

Abu: You wouldn't take the bus down there?

- No.
- Don't trust buses. You get out there and then all of a sudden the bus is going to mysteriously stop coming. [Laughs.] I get a ride.

Abu: Have you ever gotten stranded down in South County?

- No. Because I get a ride.
- Wouldn't want to be stuck down there at night.
- Coming home from the mall one time, I remember, I got stranded. I walked going towards Reservoir Ave., all the way back home.

Abu: The mall down in Warwick?

- Yeah, the Rhode Island Mall, matter of fact. I guess it wasn't on point [?] with their schedule. From that day I don't really take the bus. It's better off to walk or get a ride.
- I got stranded in Newport. I had to call my mother, I had to wait like two hours. Aggravating.

Abu: Now when you guys got stranded in Newport, when was the last bus?

- I don't even know what time it was. I wasn't paying attention to the clock.
- Some of the buses stop at seven. You can't count on them.
- Why is that? Why they gotta stop at seven?
- They should run all day.
- Every other bus they should run. What happens if I live in Newport and I come to Providence to work? And I take the bus and I don't get out until 7:30 and the bus stops at 7? What am I going to do [unintelligible]?

Abu: There are two things...or you'd have to have money for a taxi.

- Do you know how much money that would cost? Shoot.
- That's more than one-fourth mile, you're paying...
- [Multiple people speaking at once. Unintelligible.]

Abu: Now when you all are here, at YouthBuild, are you doing jobs? Do you have internships and stuff that you go to?

- We're going to be starting that. We just had to be here today.

Abu: How do you figure out, or how do you decide, where you'll go to do your jobs or internships?

- We try to find what we want.

Abu: OK. Now, are you thinking about where you'll go now, are you starting to do that now? How will the issue of transportation impact where you decide to go and the kind of job that you might get?

- Do the best I can, that's my point of view. I always find a way.

Abu: Well, what if this place you were going to was in Newport? Could you walk there?

- Newport? No, I'd have to find a ride for sure.

Abu: All right, it sounds like for most of you, you know that if bus transportation's not going to get you there, you can probably find a ride someway, somehow.

- Nah, I can't get a ride. Only if I'm stranded out there will somebody come pick me up. Nobody give me a ride. I wouldn't ask my mother for a ride to Newport 'cause I got no reason to go there.

Abu: So when bus service stops, sometimes at an hour you think is too early, you have to do one of a couple things. Walk, get somebody to come pick you up if you're stranded, or catch a cab.

- Takes like an hour to get across the damn bridge.
- Hell yeah.
- I'd just get a cab.
- There should be more buses, too.

Abu: Sounds like maybe not enough buses, they don't run frequently enough, and sometimes don't run late enough. I used to live in Wakefield, South County, and I worked up here in Providence at URI-Providence. This is when there was the old building, kind of across the bridge. And that's when they used to have the Bonanza bus stop downtown, right near the Civic Center. And the last bus that was leaving to go to South County was at five o'clock. If I ever happened to have missed that bus—and I never missed it—there wasn't anything moving down to South County the rest of the day. So I would have had to figure out—

- Yeah! That's what happen to me!

Abu: Fortunately, I never had to figure it out. I guess I would have had to call my wife to come all the way to Providence to pick me up. So I know what you're talking about in terms of trying to get around.

➤ And you gotta rush around! I can't stand rushing, neither. Take my time.

Abu: OK. Any recommendations, suggestions that you would make to the city to make getting around, transporting yourself around Providence or Rhode Island easier, better, safer? Any recommendations you have that you would want to give? This is your opportunity now.

- Invest in more buses, tighten up the schedule.
- I can see them not investing in buses at the moment, cause they're building that thing downtown, but in the near future.
- Be sure they're coming on time as the schedule says.
- Don't have too many people standing (at the shelters). Have some seats at the shelters and at bus stops.
- On the buses, how many seats they have should be how many people can sit.
- So other people won't have to stand up.
- When you're sitting down, you can get hurt. When you're standing up, it's all done. You can roll all the way up to the front.
- The bus ever gets in an accident and my neck hurts, they're taking me in an ambulance!

Abu: All right, any other ideas, suggestions for improvement that you want to offer? Last chance.

- Cushions on the seats, more coverage.
- Those seats make your butt fall asleep.

Abu: Somebody said that they take the trolley, you know they've got those little trolleys running around {Providence? [Male speaker: "I do. I take them."]} I've never taken them before. What's that like?

- They suck! They got wood seats, they hurt your back when they hit a bump.

Abu: But they're cheap, right?

- They're free.
- They're not free, they're fifty cents.
- I got on going to downtown Providence and it was free.
- It ain't free.
- Well, he let me on free. He said it don't cost anything.
- Not for you.

Abu: I appreciate very much all of you sitting around and giving us your opinions about travel in Rhode Island, I do appreciate it. They will be updating the plan, and we will be getting back to you, giving you information about what the plan entails, give you an opportunity to see maybe how your suggestions got implemented in the plan they're going to come up with. I appreciate your time today, and I'll see you all again soon.

YouthBuild

Focus Group Highlights and Recommendations

Modes of Transportation

- ✓ Most participants indicated that they use public transportation, and several use cars (self or friends and relatives)

Accessibility, Reliability, Comfort and Safety

- ✓ Buses run *too infrequently*.
- ✓ Some reliable *bus routes have been terminated* causing inconvenience
- ✓ Buses *don't run on schedule*, sometimes early, sometimes late.
- ✓ There should be *more shelters* because of the *weather and the lengthy wait* to catch the bus.
- ✓ Some routes like Broad Street run often.
- ✓ *More buses* on certain routes.
- ✓ Some *drivers drive fast*, dangerous for passengers.
- ✓ More buses *should have bike racks*.
- ✓ Participants *don't trust buses to travel far* (South County).
- ✓ *Evening schedules are inadequate*.
- ✓ It is common place to *get stranded* because of inadequate schedules.
- ✓

Customer Service (RIPTA bus drivers)

- ✓ Some drivers have *bad attitudes and swear* at passengers.
- ✓ *Drivers pass by passengers* at bus stops, especially youth and students.
- ✓ Some bus drivers are *courteous*, say "hello" and "have a nice day" to passengers.
- ✓ Some *drivers stop for passengers* running for buses.
- ✓ Some *drivers don't stop for passengers* running for buses.

Affordability of Public Transportation

- ✓ The fare is seen as *expensive*.
- ✓ *Bus passes are too expensive* at \$35.
- ✓ *High school students* who don't live far enough from school *have to pay* an expensive fare each day.
- ✓ RIPTIKs can be helpful if you have the money to buy it.
- ✓ The trolleys are reasonably priced.

Walking and Biking for Exercise and Recreation

- ✓ More buses *should have bike racks*.

Driving Destinations and Road Conditions

- ✓ Potholes

Participant Recommendations:

- ▶▶ "Invest in more buses."

- » "Tighten up the schedule."
- » "Be sure they are coming on time as the schedule says."
- » "Have some seats at the shelters and at bus stops."
- » " On the buses, how many seats they have should be how many people can sit." (take the bus)
- » "Cushions on the seats."

8. Youth In Action

March 1, 2001

Facilitating: Pam Zappardino

Participant / Constituent Group: Youth

Pam: So why don't we just start out...I guess the first thing I'd like to ask you is how you get around the city?

- Bus
- Car
- Bike
- Bike and bus
- Walking

Pam: Did somebody say car? No? Maybe I imagined it. OK, so we have, bike, bus, bike and bus, and walking. [Respondent: A LOT of walking.] A lot of walking! OK. Well, why don't we start off talking about the buses? What o you like about the buses?

- That it gets you somewhere.

Pam: OK, that they get you where you need to go. Do they usually do that pretty well? Is there usually a bus for where you want to go?

- Yeah.
- In some places there aren't. My school is on the East Side of Providence, but it takes a really long time to go all the way around just to get to my school, when there's another route you can take just to get straight there. They don't go directly.

Pam: Anything else you like about the bus system, that works really well, you think?

- The Broad bus actually comes every ten minutes, every fifteen minutes, so if you miss one, chances are I will find one in the next five minutes. [Pam: That's the one that goes up and down Broad Street?] Yeah. But the other thing I would want is another bus that goes up Broad Street, because I cannot take any other bus to go up Broad except the Broad Street bus.
- I like how big the buses are, 'cause it's happened to me before that the bus is just too full to get on, but it seems like, I don't know what it is now, maybe the buses are bigger or less people are taking my bus, but nowadays I find no trouble with having to stand up all the time during my ride.

Pam: What do you think about how much it costs to ride the bus?

- It's too much. [Pam: How much do you think it should be?] I think they should go back to it being a dollar, and then twenty-five cents extra for the transfer, because when you have to look in your pocket for a dollar twenty-five, plus another twenty-five cents, it's really hard, you're all like, scrounging around for another quarter.
- One of the things we're running into, which is a major problem for Youth in Action, is that we give people RIPTIKs to take the bus to get home. But they must have passed some new rule, because it used to be you could use a RIPTIK and give them twenty-five cents to get a transfer to get another bus. Now they don't let you do that. We're giving people two RIPTIKs just to get home once, and so it's really expensive for us to be able to do that, and I don't know why they initiated that. [Speaker is a staff member at Youth in Action.]

Pam: That does sound like it's an issue. Where do you [to group] use the bus to get to? Where are you going when you take the bus?

- School.
- Work.
- Home.

- The mall.
- Here, to Youth in Action.

Pam: Now, we've heard that the bus runs pretty well on Broad Street. What about those of you that have to take other buses?

- The 56 sucks.
- It never comes in the afternoon.
- I think there's a problem with the 56 bus, 'cause it doesn't come every hour—it comes like every other hour—and people have their programs at my school, and you can't take the bus in front of the school, so you've got to wait like over an hour.
- The 40 bus, because it stops at like seven o'clock. **[Pam: What part of the city is that bus?]** That's like the Butler Ave. bus. Especially when it's snowing or something like that, it takes even a longer time to get to school, and sometimes one bus will skip a bus time and just go to the next one, so you have to wait out there for a half-hour to an hour. It's really irritating. Then when I get on the bus, sometimes the bus driver is very rude.
- Bus 18. **[Pam: Where is that one?]** That's the Union Ave. bus. I used to take 31, and that came like every five minutes, and then I moved and I had to switch. And that bus (18) runs every hour, and after about 6 o'clock, I don't know if the bus will ever come, so I try not to take the bus after six o'clock. It comes once every hour. If I miss the bus, and chances are, I'll miss the bus just by that much and the bus will be going, I won't be able to run and catch it, I'll have to wait a full hour outside in the cold, waiting for the next bus to come.

Pam: What happens if you do miss that last bus? How do you get home?

- Walk.
- I ain't scared to walk.
- In some cases, like, you have to walk. I have to walk all the way from downtown to my house.
- Oh, my God. Your house is far—she's way down at the other end—wow. She's almost in Cranston, she's so far in Providence.
- Yeah, I have to walk. Something happened and a lot of Broad Street buses broke down. My bus has broken down, so that's some of the problem sometimes. So I have to walk all that way.
- I know I have to take a separate bus that goes completely off-route. It's still in my neighborhood, but it goes completely off-route, and I have to get off at a certain bus stop, and then walk maybe five blocks from that bus stop to my house.
- There's another problem with the buses. You know the back, how there's the stairs for the wheelchair? There's always a problem with that, and that just wastes people's time, 'cause sometimes it doesn't work.

Pam: So they can't seem to get the wheelchair lift up and down?

- Or there's always something wrong with it. Or the bus sometimes doesn't start.
- Or when the bus is overly crowded, sometimes it drowns out the people's voices in the back trying to yell, "Back door!" This just happened to me today. I went all the way, past two stops that I had to get off, and I had to get off at Expressions, that shoe store that's down the street, and walk all the way here. Because I kept yelling "back door!" but I guess the bus driver didn't hear me. Or something's wrong with his back door.
- There are two problems. It's either overpacked, especially after school. They used to have charter buses lined up on Broad and Westminster, waiting to take you to school, but they don't do that anymore. I guess the public was complaining about it or whatever, so they don't do charter buses anymore. Now it's such a problem, because kids from Classical and Central are trying to get there at 2:30, and the buses will take like 50 people, on Broad Street, and that's not cool. Because if they get into an accident, 50 people can be screwed up. And the other thing is, buses are going by you when there's nobody in the bus. They say "Out of Service," for whatever reason, and you're waiting for

your bus, sometimes for twenty-five minutes. Sometimes they'll say a bus is right behind them, and it's not, or it's not your bus. And that's a problem.

Pam: What about the drivers?

- Some of them are good.
- And then they make sure the sign shows that says "fine for assaulting a bus driver," but a bus driver can assault you in any type of way. Bus drivers will, like, talk behind your back. Talk loud enough so you can hear, so it's really hard.
- Most of the buses I've been on are pretty good. Except I have a problem with the 56, although I live over there. I always take the same buses with the same guy, and for some reason, I guess one day, he had a bad day, he won't let me on the bus with my cousin. And he knows we live together. We use the same bus pass. But sometimes a lot of bus drivers do that. They say, "I don't know you. You don't look alike." So they don't have to walk from downtown to Chalkstone.
- That's another issue that I don't really know too much information about, but at least when I was in high school, students could use their bus passes till like 6 o'clock, because of after-school activities, but it seems as though that has changed, and a lot of students can't use bus passes after three.
- If you have an after-school activity, they give the school a stamp. I think it's only like, till 6, but a lot of track practices last longer than 6. They only let you have it till about 6.
- I have a sticker. They have different stickers. It's mainly till 7 p.m., and they have a purple one that's till 5. They used to give our school till like 5, and that's the normal time that I get home, because my school doesn't get out until 3, and once we even get the stickers, and the bus driver wouldn't let me and my friend on. He said, "no, it's after 3," and we're like, "but we just got out of school." He would not let us on.
- I take the bus myself, and I think an issue with punctuality is very key. I just moved from the East Side, Hope Street bus, where I was used to the bus being very punctual in coming, to Cranston Street, where, for some odd reason, buses seem to come at very different times. And I do think it's related to areas of the city where bus routes are. I think more attention is paid to the East Side rather than the Cranston Street area. And also, I feel like bus drivers should have bus schedules on the bus. People need that and oftentimes I need one, or I witness other people asking for one, and there are just none available. So I think that's really important.

Pam: Any other things about the bus?

- Yeah. 56, right? How I say it don't come a lot? In the morning, I don't go to Mount or anything but I live in the area. The bus comes a lot in the morning. But after 11, or after school exactly, the bus never comes by. Even on Fridays or Saturdays after school, I'll be waiting outside for an hour, hour-and-a-half. They come and I say, "you was supposed to come at such and such time," and they say, "oh we came by and you wasn't here." They just never come by. Bus 42, in the morning—I go to Hope—they just never come by on time.
- For bus 11 it seems like after 8 o'clock, 8 a.m., they stop sending so many buses, but they don't understand that kids usually don't get out until about 8 o'clock, we are late; we don't care. So they seem to send out like more buses in the morning, around 7:30 which is fine, they send out a lot of buses, but then they stop after 8. So you end up later than you should be. Granted, it's your own fault, but the bus should be more punctual. They should run until at least 8:30 because kids are sometimes running late and still need to get to school on time.
- Also, bus 18, I get out of school at 2:30 and my bus comes every hour, and it comes at 15 minutes past the hour, so it comes at 2:15, but since I get out at 2:30, I can't necessarily go stand at the bus stop for that amount of time, either it's cold outside, or sometimes it may be dark in winter, so if it's 2:30 then I have to wait for the 3:15 bus, it's just crazy, and I'd rather if it just came, because it knows we get out of school, and if it could just come between 2:30 and 2:45. If I miss that, that's my own fault. It would just be more convenient for me to not have to wait at school, or to find something to do until 3:15.

Pam: Do any of you take the bus after dark? Does it bother you at all?

- After dark it takes forever.
- Yes, especially bus 11. After seven o'clock, it doesn't come except every half an hour, and then when I get off the bus, I have to walk up a long street, and they have a lot of empty houses on that street. It's hard for me, that's why I try and leave at a time I know there will be some light outside.
- Also downtown is a little bit scary at night. [Multiple group members chime in with agreement, "yes," "yeah," "oh, uh-huh."]
- Especially since the construction started. You can't always stand under those shelters, you have to stand on the side of the street where your bus comes. It's not convenient, even for the people who are walking by.
- And there are definitely no lights in downtown. You don't know where "M" is [*a bus stop*], and there are no arrows. So you're just trying to guess or ask people, and people don't know where the buses are.
- And also, I know it's because they're trying to make Kennedy Plaza better, so they put all this up, but I've been on so many buses thinking I was supposed to go to "L" and instead I had to go to "C." Where's "C"? You have to go everywhere just to look for "C."
- Yeah, there are certain buses, they tell you, "take C before 4 o'clock, and then go to L after 4." It's like, which one do you want me to go to? You want me to go to C or L? If you're going to have a bus, have it there the whole day. Don't switch it around. It's already hard as it is.

Pam: If you're trying to get somewhere that you don't usually go, and you've got to figure out how to get there by bus, is that an easy thing?

- No! [multiple respondents]
- No, it is not.
- I would rather ask someone I know, "how do you get there? What bus do I take?"
- Actually, I would rather walk, because they'll say, "take bus such-and-such." You end up in wherever, or you can't find bus such-and-such, or when you DO find bus such-and-such, it's taking a different route because the RIPTA bus system has changed around so much.
- Or if they're late, they're just like, "Get on, get on!" And I'm like, "well, how can I just get on if I don't know where you're going?" They get really impatient, and then when they go somewhere else, you have to walk from there, and it's a waste of time. Also, I don't think they give out the school bus passes to enough people. I feel like I live far enough away from the school to get a bus pass, but here I fill out a form, and every year they tell me I don't live far enough away, and it's like, "how far do I have to live in order to get a bus pass? Do I have to walk in the rain, sleet, hail, and snow?" I'd rather not pay the dollar and a quarter every single day, or the thirty, thirty-five dollars it costs for a full bus pass. I just don't think it's fair that some kids should get it and some kids can't. There should be a regulation as far as which kids get it and which kids can't. I don't know how you guys can work it out, but I'm always despising the fact that I have to walk because I missed the bus, or that I have to pay a dollar and a quarter to take the bus every day. It's not convenient.
- There are people that have bus passes who do not live "far enough" away. They can walk to school and have it not be a problem. If I wanted to walk to school, I'd have to get up pretty early, 5:30 or so in the morning. It would not take me a short amount of time. The other thing is plenty of people get rides. I'm not saying the East Side is anything special, but there are plenty of people on the East Side who have bus passes and they're giving it to people in Washington Park and stuff like that cause they don't need it, they get rides or they have cars or whatever the case may be. They're not giving the bus passes to the people who really need it.
- I live near Cranston, and I know other people in my area who do not get bus passes. We can't stand it, because every month a certain amount of people get their bus passes, and we're like, "can we have one, too? Please?" I don't see why they should get one and we shouldn't. Like she said, some people

get rides to school and they have extra bus passes when I don't even have one, and I still have to pay that money out of my pocket.

Pam: Now a lot of you said that you walk. How is the city for walking?

- I get harassed every day, at least three or four times a day. Every morning, every time I leave, doesn't matter what time, I get harassed every single day. There's a guy who tried to get me in his car, actually tried to grab my arm. I get harassed every day. I live over there near the Boys' Club, over near the West End, and that's a pretty far walk to be walking. They told me that I don't live far enough, and for me, I'm walking to Broad Street to take the bus, but I just walk or get a ride or something. I don't feel safe. But my school's flexible, the teachers come and get us. Especially, Elmwood and Admiral, and West End around there, that's where I find all my stalkers. And I walk by myself.
- It doesn't bother me.
- Well, you're a boy!
- Most of the time I walk with him or my little nephew, and it doesn't bother me, but I used to have a bus pass for my family, but now we don't get it anymore. And I live only maybe two point five, six, maybe seven miles or so from school, and now, I get RIPTIKs from here to come here. But what I do sometimes is I use a RIPTIK to go halfway to school, then I walk the other half of the way to my school, then after school, I call my cousin and he comes to get me on the bike. And I'm in high school, I don't want somebody coming to get me on a bike! [Group laughter.] Plus, he's younger than me, so I feel kind of dumb. Good thing I start walking, so nobody actually sees me. And on Saturdays, the buses never come. And I always use the buses Saturdays. It's hard now. I ask for a bus pass, but they never give it.
- They need some more police outside, 'cause I get harassed just too much. Like today, a guy came up to me and was like, "Get in my car." I was like, "what are you talking about?" I go through that like every single day. And it's a shame, because one day it's not going to be like "get in the car," they're going to really pull me in the car and I'm going to have to get crazy. So, there's time they just follow me for blocks and blocks, and it only takes seconds for them to snatch you. And I'm little, I'm only like 4'10" so this guy was crazy, he waited for me, not to be specific or nothing, but he was at the corner and he said, "get in the car," and I looked at him like he had nine eyes, and I just kept walking, and he was like, "you know you want me," and I was like, "uhhhh." You could tell he had drugs in his system, 'cause he was like shaking, I was like, God, just let me get to my school, know what I'm saying? And I had took the bus that day, from Broad Street, I still got to walk all the way down Elmwood to get to the West End. I'm paying a dollar twenty-five just to go from MBS to St. Joseph's, and I still got to walk the same road I get harassed at. So I go down the street or whatever, and he was like, "all right," and he made me think he left. Soon's I got to that corner, he was right there. He had the window down, and his pants was off, and he was...know what I'm saying? And that was bad, that was scary, then I tried to walk, and he swerved in front of me. You talkin' about running? I mean, I don't even think my body caught up to me, 'cause I was done, I was out. And luckily a car swerved in front of him, and I was like that's it, I'm through walking to school.
- It's in the morning [multiple people saying this or agreeing with it.]
- You get harassed on the bus, especially if you're female, you get harassed on the bus, by the bus drivers, standing at the bus stop waiting for the bus. No matter what you do, you're going to get harassed, and you know, you have to figure out tactics for yourself in order to protect yourself and keep yourself safe, but no one should have to endure the type of things we endure on a daily basis. It's really not...it seems like no one seems to care. It seems like no one ever thinks about the type of things she has to go through, or I have to go through. 'Cause like her, I've experienced things like that, it's not even funny. When someone's bothering you, you think, "oh, they're just trying to bother me. Or they're just hitting on me." You say "leave me alone" or "get out of here," but sometimes people take it the wrong way. Then it just ticks them off, and they go crazy, and you just gotta run. There's nothing else you can do but run, because it's not like the bus is going to come. It's not like

you can call a taxi. It's not like there's immediate help for you. Sometimes the best way to protect yourself is just to run. I've had to do that; she's had to do that. People are crazy. You can't stop people from being crazy. But maybe if there could be police in the city. Even if there was more pay phones or something, 'cause I can never find a pay phone when I'm trying to call 911.

- When they asked me did I get the license plate, I was like, "I wasn't thinking about no license plate." They was like, "describe the car," 'cause they called the police when I got to school, 'cause I was like, "look, I ain't staying for the day, I got to go home, and try to do something to prepare myself." And they called the cops, who were like, "all right, we'll try to look around." They weren't going to look around. That's just to cheer you up, just like you do to the telemarketers who call your house: "Yup. All right. I got your number."
- I don't know if there should be people on the buses with the RIPTA guys, while they're driving. because I'll be sitting in the back of the bus, and some crazy drunk guy will come on, and no one seems to care. I've gotten off the bus because there was a crazy guy, and I've had to walk all the way home, and that really isn't fun to do, and that's not cool, when people harass you.
- Even if it's an off-duty police officer on the bus, because I've been in situation when people will pull out knives in front of me on the bus, and that's not safe for anyone to be in that kind of situation. Especially on the bus. Usually Broad buses are pretty full, and they should have security there. It's not a safe situation at all.
- I was on the bus once, just like any normal day. But then these two kids got on, and they were having a fight, and all of a sudden, one just took a gun, and with the back of the gun just hit the other kid in the head. And I don't know if the bus driver just didn't want to act like he knew, or if he really didn't know, but there was fighting on the bus, and I was like, "I need to get off this bus." And another thing, when you get off the bus and it's late, there's all this crazy guy near my house.
- [Group chatter. Hard to distinguish what is being said.]
- This is all when you're trying to go to school or coming back.
- OK. one of my closest friends is in a wheelchair, right? When she's getting ready to get on the bus, they'll put the stairs down, and they don't go back up. All the time. Then he'll try to do something on his little walkie-talkie, and tell them "we need a bus to come to the 56 stop," and we have to wait a half-hour in the cold, because she can't get on the bus in her wheelchair. Because the bus is not ready to take her in her wheelchair, because they're all broken.
- And then they have to go back up to close the door.
- One time, me, her, and another girl were at Kennedy Plaza, and there were no lights on—it was pitch black—I was actually going to her house. We were taking bus 11, the Broad Street bus. Normally bus 11 comes every five minutes, but this one particular night it just did not want to come, and we stood outside waiting at least forty-five minutes. While we were standing out there, some guy, some old man, was making obscene comments at us, and he kept winking at us. And he kept moving closer and closer to us. And at first we didn't think anything of it, but he kept moving closer to the point where he was almost standing completely next to me. And we had to physically move ourselves, and he followed us, so we moved ourselves again, and he followed us again. Then we found complete strangers, young black males, and we were like "please just stand with us for a little while, 'cause this crazy man is following us around. He's winking and staring." They were like, "all right, you can just stand by us for awhile." We stood there and the guy did not stop. So we moved from that spot all the way back to then original spot we were in, and he stayed where he was, but he kept with the looks, the gestures, the whistles. But he was completely intimidating us. After a while, we just couldn't take it, and me and the other girl, she had never been in the situation before, and she was like, "just be quiet and he'll go away." I was like, "no, you be quiet and he'll kill us." So we had to actually make a situation of it. We basically made a scene. Everyone standing at Kennedy Plaza turned and looked at us. We started screaming at the top of our lungs, "everybody please look at the old man in the green coat. He is making obscene comments at us, he is calling at us, he is winking at us. If you see us on the 10 o'clock news, please make sure you identify this man as our possible murderer, killer, whatever. Because he is bothering us and we do not feel safe." Finally the bus came, and when we

got on the bus, he came up the bus and he was at the window, it's like there's no protection. We had to go to strangers in order to get protection in Kennedy Plaza, and this was the beginning of spring, so it wasn't dark for that long. It was completely unnerving, to have to endure it, and any number of things could have happened. It's really scary to understand, for girls, [many others agree].

- You know what's not fair? If our bus passes aren't good for the time we need to be on the bus, young women, the bus driver should at least let us get on the bus. Stuff can happen to us.
- Well, I know I got on the bus and there was this man bothering me and the bus driver didn't do nothing. He was flirting with all these older women, 'cause he was really drunk, and you could smell the alcohol.. Me and my girl was just laughing. It was crazy. he was talking, and he was feeling on this lady. She was like, "stop, stop," and the bus driver didn't do nothing. he didn't stop, he didn't throw the guy off, nothing. This was Plainfield, so I was like, "I'm getting off," and he started calling me an "f-ing nigger, you better stop looking at me." I was like, "Lord. I'm not even looking at you, I'm not even paying attention. You disrespectful." And he got in my face. My girl, she's just sitting there. So we got off the bus, and he follows me into the store, "where's she at...?" We started walking, and them streets are dark. There ain't no little streets. Those are long, dark streets. She's short and kind of big, so I leave her by herself. I'm like, "I'll come back and get you." ...And then they wonder why people are getting raped and molested and stuff. You're not giving us no safety or nothing. You's are not doing nothing about it. Nobody goes and calls the cops after they get harassed.
- I just want to say, 'cause you said something about drunk people on the bus. We were at the bus stop and there was this drunk guy, and he was foaming at the mouth. And he was talking to us, talking, "don't be scared of me. I'm not going to do nothing to you." We had to walk to another stop, and whoever put a bus stop in front of the graveyard? Bad idea! Then another time I was on the bus, and there were two people really drunk, and they started fighting on the bus over a can of beer.
- I don't know if they can do something about it, but I think they should have somebody going on the bus, 'cause there's some nasty stuff, some weird people going on the bus. Kids actually get on the bus with cigarettes and smoke it, and they don't do nothing even if it says "no smoking." Kids actually smoke weed next to me. I act like I was spitting just to get away from the smell. Once some guy tried to come up to me and harass me—a dude!—he was an old guy, he was drunk. We had to leave.

Pam: A number of you actually said that you ride bikes in the city. [Several people nod, say "yes," or "I do," or make other signs of agreement.]

- Excuse me, I have something to say about that, 'cause I have a bike. My bike cost four hundred dollars, and I have a Rose, with the pegs, and the dirt thing to stop the dirt from hitting you. I went down the street, and there was a group of kids, and they were like, "get off your bike." You can't go to the store, you can't even go to the door. I don't go outside. My cousin asked me, could he use my bike to go to Washington Park, and I said no, 'cause somebody might jump him 'cause he's on the bike. There's plenty of people who have told me, "get off the bike," or whatever. That's not safe. My little sister can't even ride the bike 'cause there's little kids punking her off her bike. My sister should be outside enjoying herself. She can't ride her little Jeep thing, 'cause my mom's scared, grown people have tried to bully her off her Jeep thing. It's not safe at all.

Pam: What about the traffic? Do you find when you're riding the bike that you have problems with the cars?

- The only thing I have wrong with it is that I have to use it 'cause I don't have a bus pass, or because it's quicker. If I'm going to Youth In Action, and my sister's waiting outside for the bus for an hour,. I'll make it here in like fifteen minutes while she's still there at the bus stop. So right now, I ride my bike.
- When I ride my bike, I use it mainly during the summertime. But seventeen year-olds will come up and tell you to get off your bike. Once this kid came up to me and tried to steal my bike right in front of my face. He had a big old chain cutter and tried to steal it. I was so happy that my older cousin with me. He just went in and got my bike back.

- That is so rotten.
- Especially in traffic, during the weekends—‘cause that’s when I get to ride my bike—people are acting crazy, they’ll be swerving in the road.
- It seems like motorists have no respect for pedestrians or people on bikes. One time when the bus didn’t come, I was walking to my destination, it was kind of wet outside and I was in a wool coat. Person in a car drove right next to me, and the water got all over me, and it was gutter water, and anybody who knows what happens to wool; when it gets wet...it smells like a wet dog. They have no respect for us.
- Before Broad Street had crossing lines on it, you had to cross without the crosswalk. Why did I really get cussed out for crossing the street because somebody wanted to drive? So that was annoying. That’s all I got to say.
- Drivers are crazy. Not all of them, but this guy wanted to get around a bus, and the bus driver cut him off, so it made the driver go on the median. That’s dangerous. He was on the median, with traffic coming toward him. Let’s not cut people off. I don’t want to be dead.
- When there’s a lot of people on the bus and people are standing, I don’t know but it seems a lot of drivers get an itch to press the brake real hard so people go flying. Why do they overpack the buses that much in the first place? I think there should be a limit to how many people on the bus.
- If a person wants to get on the bus and he knows it’s full, it’s not really his fault.
- It is his fault. That’s him, he’s supposed to say, “sorry, my bus is full.”
- At the same time, don’t be acting like you’ve never been standing there looking at a full bus and mad ‘cause you know you have to wait for the next one.
- If RIPTA knows that street’s so busy, they should put more buses on it.
- Especially on school times.
- Yeah.
- Broad Street, Elmwood, they are all too full.
- They don’t give enough time, ‘cause I’ve been on the Broad Street bus when it’s too full, and they are packed in the morning, around 8:30 or 9, it is packed, and you are trying to get all the way out from the back of the bus. By the time you get to the front of the bus, they’re already peeling out, so you missed your bus. If you know that your bus is packed, at least be like, “well, is there anybody else who needs to get off?”
- They won’t even open the back door, either.
- That door is always broken.
- There’s a tape you press to signal the next stop, but that’s always broken.
- And then they hate it if you yell, “next stop, please.”
- They’ll see little old ladies trying to catch the bus, waving the bus down, and they’ll leave them there, just pass ‘em right by. That’s really rude.

Pam: I know we’re starting to get close to the end of our time. Are there suggestions you have? We’ve heard that when buses are really full, we should have some other buses on the line, and the idea of having some sort of security on the buses. Are there other suggestions you have for improving either the buses, or using bikes, or walking?

- I think the bus drivers, in general, should have some knowledge of bus routes. I’ll ask a bus driver, on his own route, if he stops at this point, and he’ll be like, “I don’t know. I’m going here.” But he doesn’t know what’s between here and there. And he should also know what other buses are running on that route. It’s a shame if you get on a bus, they should know. Rhode Island’s not that big, they should know. Or they should have some schedules or information to give out so we would know.
- Maybe inspections on the bus more often, because that handicapped situation is not cool.
- yeah, more inspections.
- Bus passes up till four-thirty.

- No, that's still a problem. Last night I was at my school till eighty-thirty at night. I wouldn't be able to get home. The bus passes stop too early. By the time you get from the school downtown, you can't use the passes. That doesn't help us when we have to stay after school to help or do stuff.
- I really like the inspection thing, because there are so many things on the buses that do not work, like the doors don't open all the way, the windows, the front door don't close.
- Maybe on Broad Street, like what they're doing with the trolleys on the East Side.
- Definitely have schedules on the bus, for a wide variety of routes. And also bus passes for all people. Bus passes by necessity, not by mileage.
- There are a lot of issues with riding the bus, walking, or riding a bike. Just general safety. I mean, just sitting here, listening, I work with these youth every day, and there are a lot of things that shock me. People that are dealing with ground transportation need to hear this tape, hear that youth are having such a hard time.
- Speaking of inspections, not only for broken stuff, but they should have inspection for cleaning. I don't know if people do it on purpose, or what, but you'll actually sit on a chair, and it will be wet or muddy. They should clean it.
- Bus drivers should take a class on how to be more active, because they ignore way too much stuff that goes on.
- South side buses don't show up a lot of the time. We need more South Side buses.
- If buses are going to the stops, they should just go there, not stop to get a paper or a coffee.
- The 40 bus comes every half an hour, and sometimes not at all.
- It seems like when the buses say "Out of Service" the drivers run their own busyness on the bus. This one bus driver stops and leaves the bus with the doors open.
- In some of the areas where they think kids don't always take the bus, at least that bus could come more often than once an hour. Every half hour would just be so much better.
- There's this guy from bus 56, kinda chubby, he don't have the RIPTIK transfers. Whenever it's me and him, he says I can't get on the bus. Only that guy.

Pam: It sounds like something needs to be clarified around the whole system of using RIPTIKs.

Other suggestions?

- The transfers, this old lady, she was cold, and he looked at the transfer and told her she could not get on.
- I just don't think we should wait outside if our buses are there. If a bus has a five-minute break, he won't let us on. We're freezing, and if we could just get on and wait...
- I never knew that you couldn't use a transfer coming back on a Broad bus. I think that should be looked at.
- As far as transfers go, this has happened to me, but when I take transfers, it seems the driver will give me a transfer for the cut-off time, which I don't realize till later. I paid an extra quarter for a transfer I can't even use.

Pam: I think we could go on for a long time, but we should let you go so you can get on home.

Before you go, there area couple of people here from the Providence Plan, so I'm going to let them talk to you and give you some information. Thanks, everyone.

Youth in Action

Focus Group Highlights and Recommendations

Modes of Transportation

- ✓ Participants mentioned many means for traveling, but the majority noted public transportation, cars, walking, and alternative modes (and friends or relatives' cars) as the primary means of transportation.

Accessibility, Reliability, Comfort and Safety

- ✓ *Bus routes are indirect* (school)
- ✓ The Broad Street bus *runs frequently*.
- ✓ The buses are *not as crowded*.
- ✓ New RIPTIK rule doesn't allow purchase of \$.25 transfer.
- ✓ Some *buses run very infrequently*. *Waits can last over an hour*.
- ✓ Evening schedules are inadequate.
- ✓ *Handicapped access is spotty* because the *stairs don't work*.
- ✓ Buses break down and back door doesn't work.
- ✓ Some buses *don't run on time*.
- ✓ Participants have the impression *some areas are paid more attention* than others.
- ✓ *Schedules and bus locations change* after 4:00 (downtown).
- ✓ *Overpacked buses are dangerous*.
- ✓ *Drivers drive dangerously*.

Customer Service (RIPTA bus drivers)

- ✓ Bus drivers are *rude and harassing*.
- ✓ *Drivers are not considerate of students who may get out of school late*.

Affordability of Public Transportation

- ✓ The fares are *too expensive*.
- ✓ *Passes are not valid after a certain time*, making it expensive to attend after school activities
- ✓ *Bus passes not available* for all who need them.
- ✓

Walking and Biking for Exercise and Recreation

- ✓ Bike riding is *dangerous* - people try to *steal children's bikes*.
- ✓ Bike riding is *quicker* because you can wait for a bus for an hour but ride to your destination in 15 minutes.
- ✓ Bike riding is *hazardous on the streets* - cars swerving.
- ✓

Pedestrian Safety

- ✓ *Participants are afraid* to walk downtown and wait in Kennedy Plaza day and night.
- ✓ *Students, especially female, report harassment on a daily basis*.
- ✓ *Inadequate lighting* in Kennedy Plaza.
- ✓ Motorists *don't respect pedestrians*.

Participant Recommendations:

- » "I think the bus drivers, in general, should have some knowledge of the bus routes."
- » "...they should have schedules or information to give out so we would know."
- » "Maybe inspections on the bus more often, because that handicapped situation is not cool."
- » "The bus passes stop too early. By the time you get from the school downtown, you can't use the passes."
- » "Bus passes by necessity, not by mileage."
- » "Maybe on Broad Street, like what they're doing with the trolleys on the East Side."
- » "speaking of inspections, not only for broken stuff, but they should have inspection for cleaning."
- » "Bus drivers should take a class on how to be more active, because they ignore way too much stuff that goes on."
- » "We need more South Side buses."
- » "if buses are going to the stops, they should just go there, not stop to get a paper or a coffee."
- » "In some of the areas where they think kids don't always take the bus, at least that bus could come more often...every half hour would just be so much better."
- » "I just don't think we should wait outside if our buses are there. If a bus has a five-minute break, he won't let us on. We're freezing, and if we could just get on and wait..."
- » "I never knew that you couldn't use a transfer coming back on a Broad bus. I think that should be looked at."
- » "As far as transfers go, this has happened to me, but when I take transfers, it seems the driver will give me a transfer for the cut-off time, which I don't realize till later. I paid an extra quarter for a transfer I can't even use."

9. Southeast Asian Development Corporation

March 8, 2001

Facilitating: Pam Zappardino

Participant / Constituent Group: Asian

Pam: So as I said, we're just going to have a discussion about your thoughts and needs regarding transportation around the city and state. And I have some questions that we're asking all of the groups to answer, but feel free to just chime in with your answers. If a lot of you start talking at once, I may try to get you to go one at a time so that Abu and the recorder can hear you. Other than that, it's a pretty free discussion. So, just to get started, if you think back over the past year, what are the different ways you've used to get around?

- Driving a car
- Taking the bus to school, the school bus.
- City bus

Pam: OK, so we have driving as a way of getting around, the school bus, and the city bus. How many folks take the city buses? OK, not too many of you take the bus. Do most of you drive? Mostly drivers here. Does anybody walk a lot to get around the city? OK, so we have folks here who don't do much bus transport, except for the ones who have kids on the school buses and city buses, but mostly you're driving. Do many of you fly during the year? OK, some flyers. OK, so we'll get to those. When you talk about driving, what are your general impressions about driving in the city? Is it a fun thing to do?

- It is more of a "must" thing to do.
- It's not that bad compared to other cities and towns. The difference is that we have more one-way roads.
- The roads too narrow.
- Some people park on the street, so it's hard to get through.
- Not enough signs or markings. Don't know if it's a one-way or two-way street.
- Providence streets are too narrow.
- Did you know whether or not RIPTA has their brochures or schedules translated into different languages?

Pam: Do you know that, Katie?

Katie: Not right now, just in Spanish...I know there are some plans, but right now, just English and Spanish.

Pam: So just English and Spanish right now. There are some plans, though.

- Because for the Southeast Asian elderly it's hard for them to take a bus. The schedule translated to the major language, it would be very helpful.

Pam: If you're driving somewhere and you're not familiar with how you need to go, how do you figure out how to get there?

- If the streets are not marked north, south, east, west...they need to mark them.
- Some streets signs don't even exist.
- You can't find many things.
- There's no indication of south or northeast or northwest. I have to at least know a town's main street.
- The one-way streets are hard to figure out.

- They should use different paint for the street signs. Like the reflective signs. At night in Westerly you can't find them. You can't distinguish.
- Maybe the signs are too high.
- In the city they should use the green and the black color. In the country, where it is green, they should use red and reflective white paint.
- I had a hard time finding the signs where the bus stop is. The signs are often missing.
- They should make those bigger than what they have right now.
- Some of the bus stop signs look like "No Parking" signs. It's hard to tell the difference.

When you're driving in downtown, how do you find that? Is it easy to drive downtown?

- No, no.
- Oh, it's bad.
- Traffic is a problem.
- Parking is a problem.
- Most of the big companies, they don't like to put their building number outside, it takes you a while to find the right building.
- It's too confusing. It's hard to know where to go.
- The streets, there's no proper lining in terms of the lane. Cars scattered everywhere. It's dangerous. I also have to compete with the city bus.
- Post Road, near the airport, you see the number they put on the pole: "300 to 500," it helps you find things. They should do that in downtown Providence on the street poles.
- The city bus, do they allow people to stand on the buses?
- Yes, especially in the morning.
- My children complain every day.
- That's why you don't see a lot of Southeast Asian people taking the bus. The elderly can't figure out where to go on the bus. Brochures in our language would help.
- The buses don't go on my street.

Pam: Are there other issues with the buses, either for you or for your families?

- Ten years ago I took buses. I hate taking the city bus. I saved up to buy my own transportation.
- They should have bags available for passengers in case they feel vomity. The fumes pushing up, and you feel sick on the city bus.

Pam: Do you have concerns about your kids on the city buses, those of you that have kids on the city buses? Does that work pretty well for them? Do they take the bus to school, or other places?

- I have one handicapped, and she used to take a bus to the vocational school. One time she was lost for four or five hours on the bus because she didn't know how to get up. Then I wrote her a card to carry with her. Sometimes I take her downtown to show her where to go, how to change buses.

Pam: Have you found the bus drivers to be helpful?

- They are helpful. My daughter has a bus pass, but she doesn't want to go downtown.

Pam: Other reactions in terms of kids taking the bus, or anyone else in your family?

- Parents take the bus, but they don't speak English, they don't know.
- They let the children get into the sitting bus, and it's so crowded, and the kids don't feel safe, they can't sit down.

Pam: I assume you must do some walking in the city, just to get from your car to wherever you're going, or to get your kids to the bus. How do you feel about walking in the city? Does it feel safe to you? Is it easy to get around?

- I don't think it's safe at all.

- Downtown you can walk, but there are no markings. People stop for you, but not all the time.
- Walking people do not respect or get respect from drivers. They should make a sign that you should let people walk, or walkers let the cars go.
- Some people just walk when they see a car coming.
- In Providence, a lot of disrespect everyday. Raining or snowing, the cars drive very fast, they splash people walking.

Pam: A number of you said you wouldn't feel safe walking. Is that the same in the day time or at night, or is it just at night?

- In the daytime. I don't feel safe at all.
- You're afraid of strangers, or the cars are just driving by so fast.

Pam: Do you have any suggestions about how walking in the city could be made safer?

- They should do it just like when you're home alone, you press a button, they know where you need help, and they come right there. The police department should know where it is and go right there. Along the city streets they should have these also, 2 or 3 every block.
- But then everyone will push the buttons even if they don't need help.
- They should increase the level of police patrol around the neighborhood that are known to be hard or violent.
- The sidewalk is not always pleasant, some are broken or there is none, just dirt.
- Kids play with the street signs, and you don't know which one is which.
- I want them to make it a four-way stop at my corner so they stop using horns. I would feel safer. I want my kids to play, but they're not.
- Cranston Street, on the street are blocks with trees. It's not helping slow down the cars. They should have speed bumps so they have to slow down.
- That's wasting tax money and it's aggravating.
- Speed bumps.
- You need more police to run around.
- When you walk, look back and forth.
- I never go out late because it's not safe.

Pam: Does anybody use a bicycle to get around?

- Yes.
- Yeah, I do in the summer.
- My kid does, and myself.

Pam: Is Providence bicycle-friendly?

- No.
- I think they should have some kind of regulation for bike riders. They have no respect when they ride a bicycle.
- People not riding for enjoyment, they're speeding.
- My kids, we go slow around a track, but these people speed up and they go too fast. Bicycles can dodge a car quickly, but drivers can't maneuver as quickly. But they ride their bikes in the street, and at night you can't see them.
- Talking about transportation and traffic in general, parking and all that. It is a problem in Providence, especially along Broad, Elmwood, and Cranston Streets. They double park all over, but no officers citing anybody. People parking illegally or stopping in traffic, that's a problem.
- People stop in the middle of the road to talk to each other. There should be a law, a restriction.
- They swear at you or get mad.
- Summer is the worst, they have no respect. They stop in the street talking, and we get stuck, but we're scared to say anything.

- Bicycles are dangerous in the summer, no respect. The car hits the kids on bikes, the kids hit the car.

Pam: Have any of you ever been on the bicycle paths that have been created just to take your kids or for rides?

- Yeah, a couple times.
- It's so inconvenient, it's so far.
- They should have that around here.
- In Cranston, they have that.
- I'm scared, at night, they jump right in front of you. They don't care.

Pam: Is there anything else about transportation that you think is important? That we haven't talked about yet today?

- I have a concern: I don't like the idea of the trolleys. Think they're a waste of money. I work with elderly and disabled, not only to doctor's appointment, but to the grocery store or recreation, and they can't get around. I was wondering if more funds would be put into maybe the RIDE program, maybe for that kind of use, instead of doctor's appointments. The trolleys are a waste of money. The money should go to more RIDE programs.
- I agree 150%. There should be more money for RIDE, so that there is more for our seniors to do shopping, laundry. That responsibility falls into the community, they can't do it themselves, they rely on us.
- We can't always provide transportation for them, for every person.

Pam: Other concerns or issues you want to make sure the state hears about, that we haven't talked about yet?

- How about the shelters? Those need to be covered, especially in the freezing cold. I feel bad.
- Not every bus stop has one.
- More central bus routes. I know RIPTA is redrawing those, but the nooks and crannies that people need to get to is still difficult. You still have to walk a half mile or so. Buses should encompass some of the outlying areas.
- With the trolleys, they look like a building. They should transform them into a store or an ice cream truck. They should change the standard with the school bus, with the only kids that can get transportation living a mile away or whatever. They should change the standard to a half mile, it's so long to get to school, especially in the winter.

Pam: We've found that in common in several of the groups. There's a concern about this. I think for high school it's about three miles.

- What makes it difficult is those that are in between, not necessarily exactly one mile, but .8 mile away. They can't take the bus, but it's so far to walk. My two nieces, my mom takes them to and from school, because they're little.
- Not only that but the issue of safety. You're wondering if you daughter or son is going to make it to school and home again safe. Safety of your children is the most important thing.

Pam: Well, I think we got a lot of good information today. This is the first group where we've had so many drivers. So we got a lot of information today about driving that we haven't got from other groups, so we really appreciate you taking the time to come here. I think most of you have met Katie, from the Providence Plan.

[Pam turns it over to Katie, who discusses the transportation plan and passes out resource materials.]

Southeast Asian Development Corporation

Focus Group Highlights and Recommendations

Modes of Transportation

- ✓ Participants mentioned driving as the primary means of transportation. Some participants discussed their experiences as well as their children and parents taking public transportation, RIDE and school buses.

Accessibility, Reliability, Comfort and Safety

- ✓ Many Asians (especially) the elderly don't use public transportation because of the language barrier
- ✓ Bus stop signs are difficult to see or don't exist.
- ✓ Buses are *not easily accessible* from some areas.
- ✓ Passengers *don't feel safe standing* on the bus.
- ✓ *More bus routes* are needed.
- ✓ *When children have to walk* so far to school it becomes a *safety issue*.

Customer Service (RIPTA bus drivers)

- » Bus drivers are considered helpful.

Affordability of Public Transportation

- ✓ *More money for RIDE.*
- ✓ Bus passes should be available for more children living closer to the schools.

Pedestrian Safety

- ✓ *Walking is not safe* day or night.
- ✓ *Cars don't always stop* for pedestrians.
- ✓ Cars drive fast and splash people.

Walking and Biking for Exercise and Recreation

- ✓ More buses *should have bike racks*.
- ✓ Providence is *not considered bicycle friendly*.
- ✓ Biking at night is dangerous. *Drivers can't see* the bikers.
- ✓ *Bike paths are far away* and inconvenient to get to.

Driving Destinations and Road Conditions

- ✓ Driving is considered *not as bad as other cities and towns*.
- ✓ The roads are seen as *too narrow*.
- ✓ *Too many one-way streets*.
- ✓ The signage is inadequate or non-existent.
- ✓ Some street *signs are not properly positioned* and *difficult to see*.
- ✓ *Traffic and parking are major problems downtown*.
- ✓ Street lanes are not properly marked.
- ✓ *Traffic calming methods (tree planting)* are *not as effective as speed bumps*.

Participant Recommendations:

- » " ...Southeast Asian elderly it's hard for them to take a bus. The schedule translated to the major language, it would be very helpful."
- » "If the streets are not marked north, south, east, west...they need to mark them."
- » "They should use different paint for the street signs. Like the reflective signs...In the city they should use the green and black color. In the country, they should use red and reflective white paint."
- » "They should make those bigger (bus stop signs) than what they have right now."
- » " Post Road, near the airport, you see the number they put on the pole: "300 to 500," it helps you find things. They should do that in downtown Providence on the street poles."
- » " They should have bags available for passengers in case they feel vomity. The fumes pushing up, and you feel sick on the city bus."
- » " You press a (distress)button, they know where you need help, and they come right there. The police department should know where it is and go right there. Along the city streets they should have these also, 2 or 3 every block."
- » " They should increase the level of police patrol around the neighborhood that are known to be hard or violent."
- » " I want them to make it a four-way stop at my corner so they stop using horns. I would feel safer. I want my kids to play, but they're not."
- » " Cranston Street, on the street are blocks with trees. It's not helping slow down the cars. They should have speed bumps so they have to slow down."
- » "You need more police to run around."

10. Dominica Manor

March 21, 2001

Facilitating: Abu Bakr

Participant / Constituent Group: Elderly / Disabled

Abu: OK, to get us started, when you think back over the past year, what are all the different ways you have traveled from one place to another? The different ways that you travel?

- I go RIPTA.

Abu: OK, you use the bus?

- I use the bus./Buses. (multiple respondents)
- The trolleys.
- I use RIDE.

Abu: Anyone ever use an automobile?

- I do.
- I have.
- I might get a ride from someone else.
- I get a ride with my family.

Abu: Anyone happen to ride a bike?

- Oh, no.
- Not anymore. (multiple respondents)
- I used to. (A lot of laughter & agreement in response to speaker's emphasis on "used to.")
- I take the housing and medical van--to Atwells Ave., or to my doctor in Cranston, on Broad Street. It works very well. I love that.

Abu: OK, just one more question. Does anyone ever walk to where they might need to go?

- I do. (multiple respondents)
- Yes. (multiple respondents)
- All of us walk from time to time.

Abu: OK, so many of you walk. And obviously you walk to the bus stop if you want to catch the bus. And you walk to other places, shorter distances?

- To the market.
- The PHA van. (**Abu: is that the Providence Housing Authority Van?**) Yes. I do not understand why they do not get a wheelchair lift. That is why I'm stuck with whatever RIDE wants to do with me. They have a complicated way of mixing things up, for some reason. And when people go out—I love to go out to dinner—when I was on crutches, I always went on the school bus, they have a bus that gets people. (**Abu: The Providence Housing Authority?**) Yes. But since I've been in a wheelchair, no one who is in a wheelchair, or unable to climb stair, is able to go anywhere.

Abu: So the Providence Housing Authority has transportation, like a school bus or like a van, but they don't have one that accessible for wheelchairs like yours?

- No. Not that I know of.
- Stretcher's got a bus that's got one.
- But Stretcher's not Providence Housing Authority.
- Stretch takes us once a week, or on trips.

- Stretch picks up at the Graceland Manor, takes them shopping. And they have wheelchairs.
- I think they use it only for recreation.

Abu: The bus you're talking about, is this a Providence Housing Authority bus?

- Yes, it's for recreation, and shopping, too.

Abu: OK.

- They just got new buses a year ago, I think.
- Is that Providence Housing?
- No.
- No, it's a city one.
- It's a city bus, from the Recreation Department. **(Abu: So it's a city bus.)**
- Yes. Mayor Cianci had something to do with it, didn't he?
- It goes to different clubs.
- They have a group, we have a group, we go on different trips once a month, and you can register that bus for it, you know?
- What about doctors?
- I don't know about sickness. I don't know about it taking you to different doctors.
- No, I don't think so.

Abu: So it sounds like the Providence Recreation Department does transport you all places, and that they have an accessible bus.

- One for children and one for grownups, too.
- Steve took us [unintelligible], we went to Bertucci's on Pawtucket Avenue, we went to Bertucci's...we were supposed to go to the movies, but the movies didn't open until the weekend. The movie was open.
- That was a trip.
- We went for a ride.

Abu: Now where do you all live?

- Here. [multiple respondents]
- We live here.
- We all live here.

Abu: Now, you live here, and you live here, and you've been involved, but it sounds like you haven't gotten any information.

- Of all the people I know of, I don't know any of them with wheelchairs or can't walk.
- Where is—not Arthur Park, but the other one there? They have wheelchairs there once in a while.
- Carroltown?
- Yes. They have wheelchairs there.
- But they don't take these big ones! It's just the push ones that they take.
- Yeah. Maybe that's it.
- [Too many respondents talking at once. Unintelligible.]

Abu: So what I'm hearing, it sounds like there may be a bus that may be wheelchair accessible, but we're not really certain about that, and we're also not certain exactly what you can use it for. It sounds like there are some recreational—

- Yes. [Multiple respondents]
- We can go out to dinner.

Abu: —OK, but it also sounds like going out to dinner, which is something she mentioned she couldn't do [referring to previous speaker who uses a wheelchair]. It sounds like we need to get some more information about the availability of that bus.

- Excuse me? Stretch takes a lot of people. He takes them to Stop & Shop.
- But a lot of times when I go to Stop & Shop, he's over there with this big little bus, taking the people shopping.

Abu: Who does he drive for?

- The recreation department.

Abu: That's the Providence Recreation Department. OK, so the Recreation Department sounds like they have a deal to work with folks in the Housing Authority.

- And then there's somebody to take us down to [unintelligible].
- [Too many respondents talking at once. Tape did not record this part of the conversation clearly.]
- If we go shopping, we have the school bus pick us up. The school bus picks us up. At 9:30, it picks us up, takes us to Stop & Shop. [Many respondents speaking at the same time as this speaker.]

Abu: Hold on, please talk at once.

- She goes to Olneytown, the same four places she picks up. The school bus.
- We don't have that here.
- No, not here.
- How come you said put it in then?

Abu: OK, so if you don't have that, how do you go shopping?

- We don't.
- We take the bus.
- Take the regular bus.

Abu: You take the regular RIPTA bus?

- Right.
- I do.
- And then we can't get that much—
- You can't buy that much, because it's too hard to carry everything on the bus.

Abu: How many take the regular bus to go shopping?

[Too many respondents talking at once. Unintelligible.]

Abu: You don't take the regular bus, sometimes you take it and sometimes you take the other one.

- They're supposed to have those kneeling buses, they come down so you can get on, but the bus drivers are not doing it anymore. And you have your problems; you've got to get your bags in first and then lift yourself on. It's hard.

Abu: Let me go back to that in a second. You're saying that all the buses have the ability to lower themselves down?

- Most of them do.
- Some of them are handicapped buses.

Abu: Is it just the handicapped buses that can lower themselves down?

- Just the handicapped buses.
- I don't know, I—
- [Too many respondents talking at once. Unintelligible.]

- They don't like to do it. They'll pass you up on the street, or they'll be rude to you.
- They won't even pull up to the curb anymore. You got to walk out to them. That's bad.
- That step is too high. You have to arch your back.

Abu: What's your name? [Respondent: "Agnes."] **OK, Agnes mentioned that sometimes she has experiences where they see that she's in a wheelchair, and they might pass her up.**

- Other people have complained to me about it.

Abu: Other people who use wheelchairs?

- Yes. It takes them longer to lower the wheelchair ramp on the buses that have it.

Abu: And they just pass you by?

- They just pass you by, because it makes them later, and other people on the buses complain.

Abu: [indicating another group member] You kind of nodded your head. Have you heard of that happening?

- Yes
- Well, they would do that.
- They're in a hurry.
- They want to keep their schedules.

Abu: OK. And you mentioned that sometimes they simply don't pull up to the curb; that you have to walk out?

- That's true, too.
- That does happen.

Abu: I know sometimes that happens because cars are parked illegally.

- Yes. [Multiple respondents]
- That is also true.
- Sometimes they just don't pull up to the curb.
- [Too many respondents talking at once. Unintelligible.]
- Excuse me, as far as the state is concerned—

Abu: Hold on just a minute.

- I wish our bus would run just a little later in the evening than it does, 'cause the last bus is around seven o'clock to come out my way, that's Hartford Avenue. And plus a lot of the shops, like Stop & Shop up on Atwells Avenue, sometimes [unintelligible] you can't go in the day so you go in the evening, but the bus, being that early stopping, you know, you can't get anything after that. I wish it ran till nine o'clock at least, the last trip, that way it would give them a chance to do their shopping and get back again.

Abu: In that instance, have you heard of anyone getting stranded because—

- Not offhand, I haven't. But I've heard many people mention they wished it ran until at least nine o'clock, some people are afraid if they don't quite make it downtown to get that last bus back, and some people just have to shop, so they miss that last one. It would make it a little easier.

Abu: So very simply for convenience sake, it would be better if you had a little bit later.

[Respondent: "Yes."] **All right. Agnes, you were going to say something else?**

- As far as the state is concerned, I don't really know [unintelligible] say I'd like to go to Newport for the day, or a weekend. Those buses don't have wheelchair transportation.

Abu: The ones that go to Newport?

- No.
- And Bonanza doesn't have one, so you're sort of stuck. Now, she's braver than I am—she walks downtown, to the Providence [unintelligible—someone coughed near the microphone] I'm not that brave, because of the way some people drive. And it's a little scary down there, 'cause I've had to drive out in the street, where they don't have any sidewalks with the curb down. Like if I used to go down to that flea market for someplace to go, I used to have to ride in the street, and I sort of hold my breath, because the cars go zoom, zoom, zoom!
- They're like that even without a wheelchair.
- They're not really watching, and so I don't go down to Providence Place, I don't go down to downtown. True, I'm not that brave, but I'm aware of being in a wheelchair, and some people get their handbag stolen, something like that, and you can't always see from behind you.

Abu: Now let me ask you a question. There are some places where you go where there aren't any—what you'd call the curb cuts—at the corners. And my understanding is that they're supposed to have those on all corners. Obviously some of them don't have that. {Respondent: "They didn't, until recently, put some on Broad Street."} OK. And when that's the case, it forces you to have to ride in the street. [Respondent: "I can't get off it!"] Without a horn! [Group laughter.] Now you also mentioned that sometimes you may not want—now, you have the capability, if you wanted to, from here, to go downtown, if you felt comfortable and safe to be able to do that. Do you know whether or not, if you went downtown, if you'd be able to do that on the sidewalks as opposed to the street? Do you know if there are sufficient enough curb cuts for you to be able to do that?

- Only in certain places. I don't believe they're in all places. My son's car doesn't work now, and he can't take the electric one, he takes the folding one. I can't push the folding one, but he will fold that up and put it in the car and he'll push me, and I'm sure, being a man, you would know how delighted he is to go shopping...[Much laughter from the other respondents.]

Abu: It's what he looks forward to every week, right? [Group laughter.]

- So he takes his groceries downtown on the bus...

Abu: Let me ask this question. We brought up the issue of feeling comfortable and feeling safe, and I want to ask other folks, when they do travel—for example, a lot of you said that you take the bus to go shopping—do you do that alone or do you go with others?

- I go alone. I carry forty pounds on my back, sometimes.

Abu: Wow. And when you go, can we talk about your feeling comfortable and safe when you make these trips? Do you feel safe, do you not?

- I was until I broke my wrist.

Abu: How did you do that?

- I fell over a snowbank. I thought I was a kid again!

Abu: When we talked to some other groups, they felt that the issue of snow on the sidewalks [many people groan, or say, "oh, it's so bad."] was real bad.

- Oh, it is bad.
- It's awful.
- They don't clean it up.
- Try to walk to the bus...

Abu: OK, I want to get Gertrude to say what she said again, make sure the tape picks her up.

- Where the bus stops, many times there's still such snow where it hasn't been removed. It's very hard to get on the bus. You could slip and slide under the bus.
- Yeah, that's right.
- It's very, very dangerous. A lot of times it's right where the bus has to stop. It has to find a place to stop first, and sometimes there isn't because of where that hill of snow is.

Abu: So in that instance, you may actually be stepping into the bus off that hill of snow.

- Yes.
- Oh yes.
- And you could slip under the bus.
- If you're getting on or off the bus, it doesn't matter, it's hard.

Abu: OK. A lot of people are shaking their heads. Let me ask you, in instances like that, have people been helpful to you? Have they offered assistance?

- Not always.
- Sometimes.
- You don't always see somebody around.
- There was a whole pile of snow there, where you cross to get to the Biltmore. There was a whole pile of snow there the city didn't even clean. You had to climb over it, to cross over [the street] to get your bus. That was very bad. I almost went down. I know.

Abu: In instances like that, have the bus drivers been—

- They don't help!
- They don't do anything!
- Not at all.
- They just sit there.
- There was a little man, I don't believe he's on the buses anymore, his name was Charlie. Nice, elderly man, and he would help us.

Abu: But he wasn't a driver?

- He wasn't a driver.
- He was retired. He would get off and help you if he could. He was a gentleman.

Abu: Now a person like that, was he just on the bus because he was going somewhere, or was he —

- No, he was a bus driver. He retired from the bus company.

Abu: So he wasn't a bus driver?

- No, he *was* a bus driver.
- He was a regular bus driver.
- A real gentlemen, real helpful, he would help you get off or on.

Abu: OK. And you're saying that most bus drivers wouldn't do what this person would do?

- No.
- They won't even tell you where they're going. They say, "read the sign." We can't see it sometimes.

Abu: I heard you make a comment, and I want to make sure we get all the comments. [Respondent: "About the bus drivers?"] Yes.

- They're bad. That's one thing, 'cause I ride them all the time. Ask them, like she said, a question and they won't even answer you, and if they do, they'll snarl at you, and they'll say, "read the sign," they're very rude. Most of them. But once in the while, you'll find a very good one, and I have found

a few of those. But boy, for the most part, you don't dare ask them where the bus is going or anything.

Abu: So sometimes it's difficult to determine exactly where the bus is going because it's hard to read the sign, and when you ask, they make you feel sorry for asking. Now I do want to ask this, because you mentioned this before: if you can think of instances—and you mentioned Charlie, for example—instances when bus drivers have been very helpful, and maybe have gone beyond to help. Can you talk about some of those instances? I'd like to hear some of those.

- Yes, I had one, when I was working on Reservoir Ave., out by the International Dart. He was the nicest bus driver I have ever seen, and I even called up the bus company and commended him for being so nice, and wondered where they got him. They said that was good, but I've never seen him since. I don't know where he is.

Abu: What kind of things did he do?

- Oh, he was just nice to you. When you got on the bus he would speak to you: "how are you today?" And if you had to get off, he would make sure he got over close to the bank. Stuff like that. Every day was the same. Courteous, yes. Very helpful.

Abu: Anyone else have any instances of bus drivers who were nice to them or helpful?

- Not today. [Multiple respondents]
- A gentleman named Fred...I don't know what his last name is, he seems to be very nice. He will wait till you're off the bus to make sure you're off before he starts the bus or closes the door. I've had someone start the bus before I got off. I don't know who they were because I don't see that good, but we should get their numbers. I'm not focusing on that, I'm trying to get off the bus.

Abu: Right. But obviously if you have someone who's nice—

- Oh, you appreciate it.
- You don't forget it.
- It's very professional.
- It's nice.
- When it comes to handicapped people, they're very rude and nasty people. Years ago when I was on the crutches, I could only walk thirty steps, twenty steps. And I used to go to the Arcade, downtown, once a month. I'd sit and have a coke, then I'd walk around till I got tired, and sit and have another one. And one cab driver brought me down there, and he parked so that it would be convenient, so someone couldn't get by him. And when I got out of the car, he said, "why don't you cripples stay home?" [Several people gasp.] [There are a few background comments, so part of the tape here is unintelligible.] It's amazing how many comments—
- They don't want anyone in their way.
- —even on the RIDE van. Now I don't know who owns RIDE, RIPTA?

Abu: I think the Rhode Island Department of Elderly Affairs.

- No, that's—
- They could do—
- They're not RIPTA, are they?
- They're a private company.
- They could do with a little organization. There was a woman on the bus, she had no cane, no crutches, nothing. And he was putting me in, and he was tying up the wheelchair, and she turns around, and she started screaming at him: "you shouldn't be able to stop to pick—there shouldn't be people with wheelchairs on this bus! It could make me late for my appointment. It takes too long to hook them up." And I looked at her, and I didn't really say anything, but then I said, "Lady, I live on

a small income. When I was on crutches, I took a cab. I'm grateful for the ride I have now." And oh! She didn't think anybody in a wheelchair should be on a bus.

Abu: Some people can really be —

- They think of themselves and nobody else.
- No consideration for other people, that's what it is.
- They forget the little guys, you know?

Abu: Now, I'm assuming that when you do the recreation trips with the blue bus from the Providence Recreation Department, that that's provided free.

- Yes
- That's right.

Abu: When you take the city buses, RIPTA, do you have to pay full fare? Is there a special—?

- No
- We have a pass.

Abu: Is it a free pass?

- Yes [Multiple respondents]
- No.
- No, you have to pay for the pass.
- You pay for it.
- You buy it.
- We buy the passes.
- Five dollars.

Abu: You pay five dollars for how long?

- Five years.
- Five dollars for five years.
- That's a dollar a year.

Abu: A dollar a year? That's a pretty good deal!

- We used to pay two dollars every two years.
- Because she's under a certain age.
- 65 and over is up.

Abu: 65 and older, it's five dollars every five years?

- Yes. [Lots of group joking about senior discounts.]
- Can I ask you about the trolleys that run? Is that provided by RIPTA?
- That's RIPTA.
- It's nice to have them and it's nice to get them, but they do not wait for you to get on, to sit down. They're ready to shut the door, and those seats, you slide on them.
- Threw me right off the seat!

Abu: And the trolleys pretty much are moving along in this area?

- Yes
- Oh yes.

Abu: But they're not accessible?

- No.
- Oh, no, she could never get on.

- They have room for a wheelchair in the front seat---they pick up the front seat, and they have the wheelchair thing.

Abu: Will the trolley take you to the Providence Place Mall?

- Yes.
- Oh, yes.

Abu: Have you ever used it to go there?

- Yes.
- But you have to take another bus to get there, don't you?
- Yeah, you have to change to the trolley.

Abu: You have to change from there to get to the mall? Providence Place Mall? But it's right downtown.

- You have to go into the city and get off and take the other trolley that goes up there.
- At the courthouse
- No, the state house. You take the trolley from the state house to downtown, and then you take the trolley to the mall.
- But that's another fifty cents.
- But we don't pay, we have our pass.
- [Random background conversation and joking.]

Abu: Yes, ma'am?

- What about getting to bus for us to go shopping? Grocery shopping?
- That's what we need.
- That what we REALLY need.
- But we can get on the one that goes by our building.

Abu: The RIPTA bus? [Respondent, "yes."] All right, just think about all the different issues you have to deal with as far as traveling is concerned. I'd really like to hear what recommendations or suggestions ---they can be crazy, I don't care ---all the recommendations and suggestions you would make that could make traveling and getting around easier. You mentioned that there ought to be a bus that will take you grocery shopping.

- That's the main thing.
- Right now we take the [RIPTA] bus to go shopping like I told you. We get our checks once a month. And we have to do shopping for once a month.

Abu: But you can't carry all that.

- We can't carry it. We can carry like two bags, and that's it, and then we have to go out again in a couple of weeks for more stuff, and that's more money we have to spend and we don't have it. We have to budget our checks.

Abu: And that's an extra, difficult trip you've got to make because you have to carry so much.

- This way here, if we had the bus, we'd put it all in the bus, and we wouldn't have to go out every other week to go shopping.
- I would assume it would be good if they had a helper on that particular bus, because it's kind of hard to get all your groceries in yourself. And everybody's doing grocery shopping, so they need it.
- When Antonio takes you, he takes all your bundles, put em on the chair for you, pull you up to the door, and helps you get it all out.

Abu: That's the Providence Recreation Department bus?

- Naw, that's the Providence School Department bus. Regular school bus.
- We don't have that here.
- We have ProCab, but it's only a small thing.
- It's a fifteen-passenger van.
- And accessibility is an issue.

Abu: And how do you deal with your shopping [to last respondent]?

- My son.

Abu: Your son, that's the one he looks forward to, right? [Respondent laughter.] **Does he go do the shopping for you, or does he attempt to transport you and you do the shopping together?**

- He does it for me because he's my caretaker, and he just changed jobs recently, and he now works at Stop & Shop. And I now have less groceries than I've had in years, because he works on Branch Avenue, and so he has to take a bus down here, then a bus up to North Main Street, then he has to walk across the bridge to Stop & Shop, but he's not going to carry that many bundles. He'll take a bus from here and go to Johnston, which is shorter.

Abu: He doesn't drive?

- He drives, he just doesn't have the money right now to fix the car. And as I said, I haven't set foot in a grocery store in at least eight years.

Abu: This is a kind of related question. You all continue to go shopping. It's not that it's that enjoyable, but is that something you want to continue to do?

- Yes.
- Oh yes.
- Absolutely.
- We all see it as important.
- Because you're still doing something, and if you give up to charity, you feel pathetic.

Abu: OK. Do other people feel the same way?

- Yes.
- Most people do, they like to do their own shopping, know what they want. If you send somebody out, sometimes they come back with the wrong thing.
- My girlfriend, I gave her a long list, to get a few things, and I showed her in the paper what I wanted, it was a little cheese. Instead of her going to buy the packaged cheese, she went to the deli for the cheese, and the cheese that she got me was a \$1.95 a pound, and the other cheese, I think it was eighteen slices for less than what she paid for that \$1.95. But I didn't say nothing to her, you know?

Abu: Not only would you be able to find better bargains, but also, just in terms of continuing to get out and maintaining your independence.

- Yes.
- It's like I have two [unintelligible; sirens in background] seventy things I can eat, my son remembers most of the times, sometimes he forgets, but every night I hate the question---he'll say to me, "what do you want for dinner?" And of course if he's tired after working all night, and half the time he doesn't feel like cooking and he has to get ready for work. He talks to Angela, and I said, "I wish they would put---I like Italian food---I wish they would put a non-Italian restaurant up here!"

Abu: [jokingly:] You've got to move to another neighborhood!

- [Respondent laughter.]
- We wanted corned beef and cabbage, but you couldn't get it from anywhere around here!
- I know this is the Italian district.

- Oh, it is now.

Abu: It sounds like some of you have opportunities to get out and go do things, the bus will take you to movies, or to Trinity to see a play...

- Once in awhile, once in awhile.
- I think you really have to look ahead.
- ...places available that went through the court even.
- Once in awhile the mayor would give us some tickets.
- School buses that take us to that Roger Williams Park.

Abu: Any other recommendations or suggestions for getting around that you think would be helpful for you?

- I think the Civic Center should put in a handicapped section. Because they have stairs, and they brought me once, it isn't for people; it's used for something else.
- [Multiple respondents talking at once. Unintelligible.]
- When they went to the ice show they had to make a special trip because I was in a wheelchair, a good eight years ago.

Abu: I think most arenas and civic centers have areas where folks with wheelchairs are seated, and it's not isolated. I know Trinity has that also. Any other recommendations about travel--about buses, about sidewalks, about cars?

- I think it was last week, I believe, Friday I was going to get on the bus, and thank god the snow was clear, and I don't know if that was for wiring or what, but the cover was sunk in, god knows somebody might have fell. That should be checked out---that's across the street.
- Do you have anything to do about snow?

Abu: Well, what do you have to say about snow?

- Well, when it snows you can't even walk down the streets.
- Here, pretty much, they shovel. But when you leave here, you're on your own.
- You could fall down into the street.
- I'm telling you, they don't shovel.
- Not like they used to years ago.

Abu: Now let me ask this question, let me ask this question. How long after a snow before the sidewalks will be clear?

- When it melts.

Abu: Now I just heard this last week, that there is an ordinance or law, people who have homes, they have to clear their sidewalks within four hours after a snow?

- Yes.
- But they don't.
- And years ago, with the buses, they used to shovel the parking lots, but they don't do that now.

Abu: I meant to ask this question before and I didn't. When you go shopping, are you very aware of the schedule? [Multiple people respond, "yes."] And is it pretty reliable?

- Yes.
- Yes, it definitely is.

Abu: Do you generally have to wait, after you've gone shopping, do you have to wait a long time for your bus to come?

- No.

- Not at all.

Abu: Also, how would you find out, if you wanted to go somewhere, how would you know how to get someplace that you'd never been?

- Call RIPTA
- Get the schedule.
- They have schedules for all the lines.

Abu: You'd call RIPTA? Have you ever done that before?

- Yes, I just called them the other day to find out how to get up to the market.

Abu: What happened when you called?

- I told him I wanted to go up to the East Side Market over there. I asked him what bus to take, and he told me, and I wanted to ask him something else, and he hung up on me!
- Guess you're only allowed one question!

Abu: Now when you get on that phone, you have to wait to be able to talk with someone, right, because they have that automated system?

- Yes, they told me what I could do, but I wanted to talk to somebody, so I just hung on to the phone.

Abu: So it wasn't very confusing? It was pretty easy to deal with that?

- Oh yeah, I do that all the time, and most of them are nice, but this guy was real on there, he didn't want to tell me nothing. I went to ask him something, and he hung up.
- And today the way the buses are, you don't know where the buses are going to stop, or where they're going to pick up. They may say Downcity, but you know, it's hard. And sometimes I want to go somewhere, but I don't know what bus to take, or where to take it. And I get fuggled, and I say the hell with it.

Abu: In a situation like that, and you know it's going on now, did you think about asking the driver?

- [Much protest from respondents.]
- Oh, no.
- The driver!
- He won't give you the time of day sometimes!
- Sometimes they don't know themselves.
- It's just like Cianci.
- Oh, yeah, forget him.
- He can take a bus up here.
- Oh, he's got his own car.
- The restaurant stops here---I call it his, cause he's got a share in it, and a space, too. Now that is never, never, never open. And when he's open in the summer, let me tell you, I would like to go in that restaurant and drag him out by his feet.
- It's all open, they take the walls down.
- They put the tables outside on the sidewalks.
- You have about that much room to get by on the sidewalks.
- The customers look at you if you look at them and you say "excuse me," and I have the urge to poke my wheel...you don't have room. Now when you come down the other way, the parking, it's very, very small. The valets, they park their cars right up against the streetlights, on the sidewalks, when it's dusk or dark, you have to go out on the street, facing traffic, I think they try to make points by seeing how close they can come to hitting people.

Abu: It's a narrow street to come down. OK, any other suggestions or recommendations—[tape ends.]

Dominica Manor

Focus Group Highlights and Recommendations

Modes of Transportation

- ✓ Participants mentioned bus transportation and rides with others as the primary means of transportation. Some participants discussed their experiences walking, taking public transportation, RIDE, school buses, Providence Recreation Department vans, and other special agency vans (Pro-Cab) for elderly and the handicapped.
- ✓ Some participants *use relatives* for transportation but are uncomfortable because it *inconveniences the relative*.

Accessibility, Reliability, Comfort and Safety

- ✓ Participants have access to a *wide variety of transportation options* including RIPTA, RIDE, and Providence Housing Authority van.
- ✓ *Vans provided for special purposes* (medical appointments, shopping, entertainment) are appreciated although *not available to everyone*.
- ✓ *Providence Housing Authority van does not have a handicap lift*.
- ✓ *Other housing complexes may have access to handicap accessible vans* take the elderly shopping and recreation.
- ✓ *Providence Recreation may also have a bus* that is available.
- ✓ Many participants must use *RIPTA to go shopping*, which limits how much can be carried.
- ✓ Evening and weekend schedules are inadequate for shopping.
- ✓ *Not all RIPTA buses are handicapped accessible*.
- ✓ *Bus stops are often inaccessible* because of snow banks.
- ✓ The buses are *reliable and run on time*.

Customer Service (RIPTA bus drivers)

- ✓ Bus drivers are *rude*.
- ✓ Bus drivers *drive pass the handicapped* because it will make them late and passengers complain.
- ✓ Bus drivers *don't pull up to the curb*.
- ✓ Bus drivers *don't help people getting on and off the bus*.
- ✓ Bus drivers *don't assist the visually impaired*.
- ✓ Some drivers are very *helpful and courteous*.
- ✓ Passengers are intimidated to ask questions and for assistance.
- ✓ Drivers drive unsafely.
- ✓ When calling *RIPTA it is easy to get transportation information*.
- ✓ Sometimes the bus drivers don't know bus information.

Affordability of Public Transportation

- ✓ Some are eligible for free passes.
- ✓ Some are eligible for reduced fare passes.

Pedestrian Safety

- ✓ Walking or using a wheelchair downtown is dangerous.

- ✓ Those who use a wheelchair must sometimes drive in the street
- ✓ Participants have fallen and been injured because of snow or icy sidewalks.

Participant Recommendations:

- ▶▶ "What about getting a bus for us to go shopping? Grocery shopping...That's what we REALLY need."
- ▶▶ "I wish our bus would run a little later in the evening than it does...I wish it ran till nine o'clock at least, the last trip, that way it would give them a chance to do their shopping and get back again."
- ▶▶ "They're supposed to have those kneeling buses, they come down so you can get on, but the bus drivers are not doing it anymore."

11. Goodwill Industries

March 22, 2001

Facilitating: Abu Bakr

Participant /Constituent Group: Disabled / Job Seekers

Abu: So everyone that's here is either participating in some sort of vocational training, or getting ready to participate in some vocational training, and the next step is either high school or full-time or part-time employment. [After a pause, someone says something about riding her bike.] **And is that the only time you ride your bike?**

- No. Sometimes around the neighborhood.
- I got to my friend's house. I can't drive right now.

Abu: OK. So if you want to go somewhere, and you don't have a ride or take the RIDE van, you either walk, or you take your bike? Do you do that is well, or is it just for recreation? Do you go down to the CVS on your bike?

- No.

Abu: Anyone take a taxi or use a cab?

- I did once.

Abu: So people walk? Take a bus?

- I take the bus. It's right across the street.

Abu: When you get off the bus, do you have to walk where you want to go?

- No.

Abu: So a lot of people take the bus, walk, take the RIDE van, bicycle. Anyone have a boat? [One woman responds: I do.] **Where do you use your boat?**

- In Little Compton, the Tiverton area, Sakonnet Bay.

Abu: Anyone have a plane? [Group laughter.] **Has anyone flown anywhere this year?**

- To Florida and to Chicago.

Abu: So most of the traveling that you've done has been in the state, or Massachusetts. You use the bus, walk, bike, cab maybe, car, sometimes yours or other folks. All right, that's a good way to start. Talk about the different places where you normally go when you take the bus.

- To work.
- To get home.

Abu: How long does that take?

- (Bristol to Providence) About an hour and a half. I do that every day.
- I go to Central Falls, Providence, Pawtucket on the bus. It takes me about an hour and a half, using three buses.

Abu: How about other folks? What's your bus trip like?

- A lot of times the buses, where they have the wheelchair parts, 90 percent of the time they don't work. One of my friends is in a wheelchair, and can't ride the bus without it, so we have to wait for another bus to come. In the bus, the seat won't go up where you lock the wheelchair in. Then we have

to wait again for a bus. It's really difficult for a lot of people in wheelchairs. We can't be where we're supposed to be at a certain time. It takes us a lot longer to get where we need to go. It's really hard to go shopping, too.

Abu: Where are some other places that people might take the bus? Because I do want to come back to this shopping thing.

- Shopping.
- The doctor
- Appointments
- The mall

Abu: OK, Let's talk about the shopping business. Do you do any shopping by taking the bus? What's that like?

- Yes
- It's horrible
- An hour and a half, we caught four different cabs, finally we got one.
- We took a cab because I have six kids, so when I go grocery shopping, I've got a lot of bags, and I can't take them on the bus.

Abu: Let's talk about taking a cab. Obviously you have to catch one, so you wind up waiting. How much might it cost you?

- It's expensive. It was almost twenty bucks. I go shopping maybe three times a month. I use a cab every time.
- I don't drive, so I have to take the bus. It's hard when you've got a cart full of groceries, and you try to sit so you're not interfering with people on the bus. It's hard to get on the bus. They want you to hurry up.

Abu: So you have to get up on the bus, with eight bags. Will the bus driver help you?

- No.
- I saw this one girl, she had three kids, one of them screaming, she was trying to take get on the bus, and the bus driver just closed the door and left them there.
- When I use the bus, I'm training folks that aren't familiar with the system. I'll ride along with them to teach them landmarks and signs. They don't want to wait for me to train someone how to take the bus. Once in awhile they know and they're nice, and they will wait for them, but generally that's the old-timer drivers.

Abu: So there are some folks that are helpful and considerate, but it doesn't sound like they are in the majority.

- No. They have a job to do, and they have a schedule.
- It's very cold outside waiting for the bus.

Abu: For people who have to take multiple buses, is there a long wait for the bus you know you have to catch, or the ones you're transferring to?

- An hour and a half---I mean a half-hour.
- That can also happen coming here, When they reach downtown, the buses here only come every hour, so sometimes they wait a half hour or more between connections.

Abu: Now for example, when folks leave here, where's the bus stop? [Respondent: Right on the corner.]

- To come here, it's on one side of Branch. To leave, it on the other. That's a busy road, people fly by. Some folks that attend training here are not as mobile as others, some people are in chairs, and other people just can't walk very fast. To get across the street it's a struggle. Some people are blind or visually impaired, but the traffic is a problem.

- There is a light there, but that doesn't mean it's safe.

Abu: Some stops in the city have a shelter. Is there a shelter there?

- There is, but on the side going back to downtown, it needs to be replaced. The sidewalk is crumbled and they never shovel, either. It's missing panels and half-bent. It's very old.
- This shelter is used a lot, by 50 people a day or more.

Abu: OK, so most people are taking the bus. Do you think that bus travel is affordable? Do some people have passes, is there a discount, do you pay full fare? What's the deal?

- Free pass.
- I just pay. But when I went to high school, I got a new pass.

Abu: About how much do you think, a week, you probably spend to take the bus back and forth?

- A few dollars a day.
- Depends where you go.
- Sometimes it could be five dollars.
- that's where the bus pass comes in handy.
- I don't have a bus pass.
- I gave my bus pass to my daughter. She goes to Central. We live in Manton, and they won't give her a bus pass. And I won't have her walking.

Abu: They won't give her a pass because she doesn't live far enough away?

- She lives far enough away. I really do not know why they won't give her a pass.
- Have you called the school?
- I went there three times. She's also handicapped.

Abu: I know that there's a rule that says you have to live X number of miles away from the school. I think it's three miles.

- basically she couldn't hear. That was her problem.
- They have to provide that.
- I went three times, I told them, but they won't give her one, and there is no way I'm going to let her walk. I give her my pass.

Abu: So transportation for you, considering that you shop, and sometimes have to catch a cab to do that, and you take the bus, so transportation eats up a good amount of the money that comes into your pocket every month. Let's talk more about the bus drivers, experiences you've had with bus drivers where you felt that they were either rude or not helpful, and I'd like to talk also about experiences you've had or seen where bus drivers have been very helpful, very considerate.

- Tuesday, 2 old ladies, one in a wheelchair. The bus driver he just put her in this thing that goes down, and he just broke this mechanical thing on her chair, and he just left her there. This other lady couldn't push her, and the one in the chair couldn't do it manual. They should have transported her home. They just left them there.

Abu: So that's not the kind of thing that happens everyday, but in your opinion, they should have made arrangements to take her home. [Respondent: right.] Can anyone think of any other instances they've seen or heard of where the bus driver showed they didn't care, were discourteous, or not helpful?

- The new drivers do that a lot. They're very rude to a lot of people, especially blind people. There has to be a system so that people don't push the blind or handicapped getting on or off the bus.
- Where the buses stop, people may not even be sitting down.
- Young kids don't let older people sit down. The bus driver should initiate some courteous behavior.

- I know they're on a schedule, but I go flying because they don't wait for me to sit down once I get on the bus.
- I don't go on the bus anymore, but I did when I was younger. They did that all the time.

Abu: We talked to some other groups, and they indicated that the bus drivers needed to do more to make sure people were comfortable and safe on the buses. They talked about other people on the bus making a scene or making it unsafe for other passengers, and the drivers never did anything. Anyone have a situation like that?

- When the buses are full, we have nowhere to sit.
- The bus drivers just scream for people to move back.
- I thought it was against the law to have so many people on the bus.

Abu: I haven't taken a bus in awhile, and certainly not when it's full, or standing up. Are there enough pulls or handles for people to hold onto?

- The back of seats, they have a railing. That's easier than if you're short.

Abu: I'd like to hear instances, if you can think of any, where the bus drivers have been really helpful, really friendly, where you really appreciated them.

- I was having surgery done to my mouth, and I had to transfer back and forth, and I was medicated, and he said, "Judy, you don't look too good." He's my daily driver. I told him I had surgery, he told me to sit down and take it easy. When I got out, my legs just gave out from underneath me, and he got out, and helped me over to a seat, and asked if I was all right. He was kind enough to get up, help me, see if I needed an ambulance.
- Some of our folks are in the community working, and some sites are supported employment. We have a group down at the Stallman Company, near the Post Office, it's Charles Street down near where it parallels with the railroad. It's difficult with the mobility issues, but the driver makes an accommodation, looks for a head count, and the bus stop is very dangerous, right near a bend, but he has them wait down where it's a little safer and accessible. The driver is courteous, but when there's a substitute, it throws everyone off. They won't stop.
- If the bus doesn't see me at night, I have to try to stand near a light.

Abu: Anyone think of any other instances where people have been really nice, courteous to you? OK, let's talk about night travel. Any of you take the bus sometimes.

- I do.
- At night, I went to CCRI in Lincoln. If people were coming out of their classes, sometimes the buses would stay late so everyone got on.

Abu: If you needed to go somewhere, and you hadn't ever been there before, how would you figure out how to get there?

- You don't know who to ask.
- Find someone downtown.
- I used to go to the RIPTA information booth.
- I can't find any schedules for any day. And the schedules don't say where the stops are.
- The schedules are actually on Weybosset street, which is 3 blocks away from where the stops are. And you're talking about downtown Providence, it's shady. People know when you're lost and confused and you become a target.
- And you could miss your bus.
- People that go by asking money, I don't have a lot of money.

Abu: When you think generally about transportation, getting around, bus transportation, what are some ideas or suggestions or recommendations you would have, that you think would be helpful to you or anyone else that might be traveling?

- I still can't find half the buses I need to take to go where I need to go.
- It was easier to find buses before the reconstruction of the Plaza.
- A lot of people who are blind, they won't tell them where they are, all the landmarks havoc changed.
- Maybe an information booth down there would be a good idea.
- I got lost and everyone was telling me differently.

Abu: Now, you may not be in a position where you'll be coming here anymore. You're getting ready to start employment, and you mentioned that you might have trouble getting to your place of employment.

- Sometimes they do pick you up on time and sometimes they don't. This week they didn't pick me up Monday and they didn't pick me up today on time. So I was late for work. They were supposed to be here at 8, they don't show up till 8:20 or whatever.
- My bus didn't show up. I think it broke down. I had to tell my boss why I got in at nine o'clock.

Abu: OK, now for folks who are going to be working, does that worry or concern you?

- That does worry me.
- I don't want to be late for work, because I might get fired.
- You have to take the bus to downtown, and sometimes the other bus you have to take takes even longer. So you may have to go even earlier downtown to catch your connection.

Abu: Now I'm not sure if you all have identified the place where you know that you will be working, but you must take that into consideration, how easy it is to get to your place of employment, and also what shift you're working.

- It's very limiting.
- My bus doesn't run after seven o'clock or eight at night. And we still take buses after nine o'clock, so we have to take other buses that are out of the way.
- Rhode Island is such a small state, and sometimes there are good jobs in Attleboro or Seekonk, and it may be closer to get there than somewhere else in RI, but the bus won't cross the state line.
- I could have got a job in Blackstone, but RIDE won't even go across the state line.
- There should be a regional agreement with some of the Massachusetts bordering town.
- A lot of times the buses are late and if they're late, you're late.

Abu: Are the buses generally on time?

- Sometimes they're late.
- A lot of times they're late.

Abu: Sounds like for the most part they're on time, sometimes they're late or broken down, but it also sounds like there's a problem with snowstorms and the sche dule.

- During the last snowstorm, they changed to the holiday schedule, and we didn't even know.
- People's jobs don't close just because there's a snowstorm.

Abu: I want to go back and ask if there are any suggestions or recommendations.

- Some kind of across-the-state-line buses into Massachusetts.
- Pawtucket to Providence needs a better bus system.
- The buses should run every fifteen minutes, I think that's reasonable.
- Especially in the mornings, more buses in the mornings. And in the evenings, if the buses could run a little longer, that would help a lot of people.

- Bryant College, they want to work with us. There are jobs available, but there are not enough buses available.
- Saturdays they need more buses.
- The bus routes that don't work on Sundays—that has to change.

Abu: OK, we're going to close. If anyone else needs to say anything, this would be the time.

Anything else anybody wants to throw in?

- Can they change the schedules? **[Abu: they're looking exactly for this kind of input, so I think this kind of information would be helpful.]**
- Will they make the changes? Because my kids got out of school, and the buses are full, and the kids have to wait.

TAPE ENDS.

Goodwill Industries

Focus Group Highlights and Recommendations

Modes of Transportation

- ✓ Participants mentioned public transportation (RIPTA) as their primary means of transportation. Also discussed was the necessity of taking cabs to return home from shopping. Some participants discussed their experiences as well as their children taking public transportation, RIDE and school buses.

Accessibility, Reliability, Comfort and Safety

- ✓ *Wheelchair accessible buses don't work most of the time.*
- ✓ *Bus travel from outside Providence takes about 1 1/2 hours.*
- ✓ *Using public transportation is difficult if you want to go shopping.*
- ✓ *Connections in Kennedy Plaza are lengthy.*
- ✓ *Shelters at bus stops provide little relief from elements.*
- ✓ *Drivers don't wait for passengers to sit before taking off.*
- ✓ *Bus schedules are not always available.*
- ✓ *RIPTA booth at Kennedy Plaza is good place to get information.*
- ✓ *Snowstorm and holiday schedules are inconvenient for many who still have to travel.*
- ✓ *Construction at Kennedy Plaza is causing confusion in terms of where to catch buses.*
- ✓ *Evening schedules are inadequate.*
- ✓ *Buses routes are inadequate and limit employability.*
- ✓ *Buses are often late.*
- ✓ *Buses arriving late to Kennedy Plaza make passengers miss connections.*
- ✓ *Visually impaired are sometimes pushed on the buses*

Customer Service (RIPTA bus drivers)

- ✓ *Drivers are inconsiderate of the handicapped.*
- ✓ *New drivers are more discourteous than the older drivers.*
- ✓ *Drivers on daily routes are very helpful and courteous.*
- ✓ *Some drivers understand handicapped issues and make accommodations.*
- ✓ *Some drivers wait for passengers that they know are trying to make the bus.*

Affordability of Public Transportation

- ✓ *Cabs are often used to return home from shopping which is very expensive.*
- ✓ *Some participants are eligible for free bus passes.*
- ✓ *School age children who do not live far enough away from school must pay for the bus.*

Pedestrian Safety

- ✓ *For people with mobility issues, crossing streets is dangerous.*
- ✓ *Uneven and broken sidewalks is more hazardous for handicapped.*

Participant Recommendations:

- » "There has to be a system so that people don't push the blind or handicapped getting on or off the bus."
- » "The bus driver should initiate some courteous behavior."
- » " Some kind of across-the-state-line buses into Massachusetts."
- » "Pawtucket to Providence needs a better bus system."
- » "The buses should run every fifteen minutes, I think that's reasonable."
- » "Especially in the mornings, more buses in the mornings. And in the evenings, if the buses could run a little longer, that would help a lot of people."
- » "Bryant College, they want to work with us. There are jobs available, but there are not enough buses available."
- » "Saturdays they need more buses."
- » "The bus routes that don't work on Sundays—that has to change."

Participant /Constituent Group: Immigrant / Family

Abu: In the year 2000, tell me all of the different ways you got from one way to another, whether it was 10 feet or ten thousand miles. What are the different ways you got around?

- I drive.

Abu: So a lot of people, about six, drive a car. What other ways do you get around? Some people don't drive, so you have to get around some other kind of way.

- I have many friends who take the bus. The bus was 75 cents. But in 1998, 1999, it got very expensive. I drive now.

Abu: OK, we'll go back and talk about the cost in a little while. How many people here take the bus?

- I do.
- I take the bus.

Abu: OK, now how many of you walk to get to places? Nobody walks?

- I walk sometimes to come here, to school.
- I walk.
- Yes, I walk. To Elmwood. I live in Cranston, and I go to Elmwood, it takes 1 hour to walk. I go to my friend's house.

Abu: Now for people who walk, do you have to walk to catch the bus?

- I live in Cranston, but I walk around my area. I walk to bus to go to work. I pay ten dollars a week.

Abu: I know she wants to talk about money! We're going to talk about money in a minute. Other people who take the bus, how far do you have to walk to catch the bus?

- Bus comes right in front of my house.
- I walk two blocks, either to Elmwood or to Broad Street.
- There's a bus stop on Potters (For the Genesis Center).

Abu: Let's talk about people who take the bus. I know that some people take the bus here, to school. Anybody have a job? Work? Does anyone take the bus to work?

- My friend has a car, so she gives me a ride.

Abu: OK, so no one takes the bus to work. For people who take the bus, some of you take the bus to come to school. Where else do you go? What else do you use the bus for?

- Maria and I take the same bus. She doesn't like to talk, but she needs to talk.
- I go downtown, to the mall. [Abu: That's what I want to know!]

[Norman, the ESL teacher, takes a moment to ask all the students to introduce themselves and say which country they are from. Folks are from Haiti, Dominican Republic, Bolivia, Guatemala, Laos, and Cambodia.]

Abu: All right, thank you. That's what I want to hear, all the places you go. Some of you probably have doctor's appointments, some of you probably go shopping, there are a lot of places you might go. I want to hear all the places you go, and what it's like when you take the bus to go places. So when you go to the mall, how long does it take you to get there? Is it hard? Is it safe, are you comfortable? Does it cost a lot? I want to hear all the things about it.

- I take the bus, a Bonanza bus, to Boston. I go visit family.
- One time I wait to go to the Warwick Mall. The bus said "mall" on it. I got the bus on Cranston Street. **[Abu: I'm very curious: how did you know that there was a bus that went on Cranston Street down to the mall?]** I knew how to go because I looked at the RIPTA map. I got that downtown, because somebody told me about it.
- I don't want to take the bus. One day, I went to the Mall Providence. I wanted to take the bus, but I don't see any buses on Cranston Street. It was a Sunday, about 2 o'clock. I waited a whole hour, the bus never came. I did not go to the mall.
- Last Monday, I wait for the bus to Cranston Street to go to the mall, but it didn't come. Four other ones went by, but no mall bus.

Abu: What bus on Cranston Street will take you to the mall? 31? OK. The buses that passed you, do you know where they were going?

- When I take the bus, I don't believe the number. I believe the place, then I go in. The bus put me downtown, I can walk to the mall.

Abu: But what you're saying is that there was n't even a bus to take you downtown, for a whole hour. OK, that's good to know. OK, where else do you take the bus? To do your shopping?

- I take the bus sometimes to go to this mall. I drive to get food, sometimes I take the bus. I go to the Warwick Mall, find some clothes, shoes.

Abu: How many people take the bus to go shopping for food?

- Sometimes. For most food, I drive the car, because there are many things to carry. Too heavy.
- I go to small markets around here. Cambodian markets. My father drives me in the car.

Abu: Does anybody take the bus to go shopping? You do?

- When I was in Boston.

Abu: OK, I only have one more question about that. Why do you not take the bus to go shopping?

- I drive.
- I live in this neighborhood. I don't have a car, but I have my feet and my bicycle.
- There's no bus where I am, in Cranston West. **[Abu: If your car broke down or did not work, how would you come?]** No, I could not come. **[Abu: Because there's no bus.]**
- I usually go to Compare Foods, which is on Broad Street, because there's no other shopping center here. If you want to go to Shaw's or Stop & Shop, you have to go to the one off Branch Avenue or the one in East Providence or the one on North Main. I can get a lot of my stuff in the bodegas. You can manage, but there are only so many bags you can take.

Abu: If you ever went shopping, and you knew that you had more bags than you could carry, would you take a cab?

- I would. It costs seven or eight bucks, sometimes more.
- I take a cab to the supermarket. I wait one time for ten minutes, it was so cold. It cost about seven dollars. Every time I go to the supermarket, I have to pay that to get home. I wait outside the store for the cab.
- I don't take a taxi. I was in an accident, and I went to the hospital, and when I was finished, I called a taxi. I paid twenty dollars. I ask him to take me only to Elmwood Avenue, it was too much. I don't have a job. That's a lot.

- I was lost, and the bus driver told the other driver I was lost, and need to go downtown. I don't have to pay. I like it.

Abu: That was a very nice story. Other people who take the bus, are the bus drivers nice, helpful, friendly?

- Sometimes yes, sometimes no.
- If my money's not there, not enough, the bus driver tells me to get down. I didn't have change.

Abu: Anybody else want to talk about when the bus drivers are not very nice?

- My bus driver never says hi to anybody.

Abu: How many people have been on the bus when the bus driver has been very nice? What kind of things do the bus drivers do when they are very nice?

- They're only supposed to stop when there's a sign. But if they know you, they stop when they see you. In Colombia twenty years ago, wherever you saw the bus, that was bus stop, so you had to hail it like a cab.
- They say, "good morning, good afternoon, how are you? How was work? How's your family?"
- When they haven't been nice, if I walk in with a soda or a piece of paper, they always say, "hey, make sure you don't leave it in the bus." I've heard them say stuff about people, and they say a lot of stuff about people: "oh, these immigrants. Oh, they don't speak English." And the transfer, there's a lot of issues with the transfer. They think you're trying to steal from them.
- The bus stops, I don't know the right stop. I passed bus 31, and he said it was not a bus stop. He told me to go to letter E. It was raining but the bus not stop.

Abu: Now, a lot of you drive. How long have you been driving in Rhode Island?

- Every day I go. I drive to my job, or shopping. About eight months.

Abu: Now you must have had to learn to get around. Is it very easy for you to drive around Providence? Are the signs clear? Do you know where you are going?

- It's difficult, but when I know it, it's easier.
- It's easy to see the signs.
- Very easy.
- No sign on Potters Avenue intersection.
- Downtown you see signs everywhere, but when you get to Elmwood and Broad Street, there are no signs that tell you where things are, like "Genesis Center 2 miles" or "Mount Carberry Church 1 mile." The signs are not on every corner. It's every three or four corners.

Abu: Now I see that Norman wrote a question for you to think about. [To Norman:] Did they write about these? [Norman: "Yup." Norman passed the papers out, and Abu asked people to tell him what they wrote.] OK, someone's asking, if they don't have a dollar twenty-five, what should we do?

- They should bill us.

Abu: For a lot of people who don't have a lot of money, it's very difficult to be able to get around, especially if you have to take a cab. Six or seven dollars, that's a lot of money.

- I walk. Sometimes my uncle gives me two dollars. I can't give the bus two dollars. If I put two dollars in the bus, no change. I give one dollars, he tells me I can't go inside the bus.

Abu: Now everyone, question number 3, how would you make it better? And the things that would help make driving better?

- Cover up all the potholes in the street
- Put more buses on the routes, especially in West Cranston.

- Many people don't have a car.
- Make it so that it is not very expensive.
- Give out bus passes if they can't afford to take the bus,
- When you go to downtown, I want the governor put more buses.
- The bus is scary, I drive in car with my brothers. I don't know how to talk on the bus. My children take the bus. My oldest, 17. She goes to school on the city bus. **{Abu encouraged her to have her daughter take her to the Providence Place Mall, to help overcome her fears.}**

Abu: OK, we're almost finished, but I want you to tell me how you would improve this. Yes, sir?

- They had this communication system in New Mexico, and they could tell you what bus was coming, and to call ahead to ask other buses to wait so you can make your connection.
- They have to shovel more. They don't shovel them at all, the stops not used as much.

Genesis Center

Focus Group Highlights and Recommendations

Modes of Transportation

- ✓ Participants mentioned walking, taxis, public transportation, cars (self or friends and relatives) as the primary means of transportation. Some participants discussed their experiences as well as their children taking city and school buses.

Accessibility, Reliability, Comfort and Safety

- ✓ *Bus stops are generally close*
- ✓ *RIPTA maps are helpful* when trying to figure out how to travel
- ✓ Some bus routes have *lengthy waits*.
- ✓ *Week end schedules are inadequate*
- ✓ *Taxis are an expensive alternative* for shopping.
- ✓ *Some areas do not have public transportation* (West Cranston)
- ✓ Participants are required to use *cabs to go shopping, which is very expensive*.
- ✓ Biking is an easier means of getting around in local neighborhoods.

Customer Service (RIPTA bus drivers)

- » Drivers have been *sensitive and courteous* in difficult situations.
- » Drivers are *intolerant* of those who don't have exact change.
- » *Unfriendly and discourteous*.
- » Some drivers stop *to pick up passengers who are not at bus stops*.
- » Intolerant of immigrants or those who don't speak English
- »

Affordability of Public Transportation

- ✓ "Small" price increases are seen as "large" for those with limited incomes.

Driving Destinations and Road Conditions

- ✓ Very *easy to drive* in Providence.
- ✓ *Easy to see signs*.
- ✓ *Potholes*
- ✓

Participant Recommendations:

- » "Cover up all the potholes in the street."
- » "Put more buses on the routes, especially in West Cranston."
- » "Make it so that it is not very expensive."
- » "Give out bus passes if they can't afford to take the bus."
- » "When you go to downtown, I want the governor put more buses."